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Editor's Note



A parrot fish smiles in its happy place, Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

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Travel is a pursuit of happiness. It's about the joy of exploration, the promise of discovery, and the possibility of change. Our journeys tell us about the world around us, while also inspiring little revelations about ourselves and our travel companions. Last summer I visited my friend, a Peace Corps volunteer, in her Cambodian village. We were blessed by a Buddhist monk, we painted a mural at her school, attended a funeral feast, ate morning glory and Kampot pepper. At sunset we took a tuk-tuk ride down a red-dirt road with an old couple who gave us a watermelon. At dusk we laughed with our host family, mixed Coke and wine and toasted *jul mouy!* (cheers!). Every hour was happy.

When we're on the road we're untethered. It's not just that our location has changed, producing logistical knots, it's that our internal disposition has become unspooled, giving us the chance to stitch a fresh story in a new place in any way

we choose. Our trails are threads, our trips are tapestries. In this issue, we're embarking on joyful journeys with happiness as the ultimate destination. Our goal is to show that spontaneity, curiosity, humor, and trust—with a little bliss in the mix—are perfect departure points for illuminating itineraries. A madcap, last-minute dash to Taipei, a yogic stretch in Tuscany, a cacophonous quest in Trinidad: these are reason enough to hit the road. The sights, sounds, and sensations these ecstatic exchanges evoke are the gifts of travel. Great trips end, Snapchats evaporate, but happiness can endure. It's the best souvenir.

The world needs more happy, and we know where to find it: on the go, in places that inspire, bubbling up among people who dare to share, surfacing in those marvelous encounters in which wonder leads to enlightenment in any language.

GEORGE W. STONE
Editor in Chief

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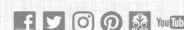
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Sunset at Ipanema often draws applause from appreciative beachgoers.

MY CITY

Dancing with Rio

BY JULIANA BARBASSA

Framed by the oval of the airplane window, Rio de Janeiro seemed ethereal, a bright patch hovering between the vast blues of ocean and sky, weightless under the sun. I smiled. A trick of light and perspective reduced this very real city to what it was to me: a daydream, a figment, something so insubstantial, it looked as if it would float away if not for the great granite peaks pinning it down.

I was born in Brazil, but left the country as a child. For decades, I had clung to this gossamer image of water, warmth, color, and light, and called it home. Now it was 2010, and I was moving back, a news correspondent tasked with covering Rio as it prepared for the World Cup and the Olympics. Although, or

maybe because, I'd lived or worked in more than a dozen cities in nearly as many countries, I also brought with me a powerful yearning to connect with the only place that had remained a constant in my life.

The city I found was a lot more complicated than the picture I'd carried in my mind. A metropolis with more than six million people and its share of problems, Rio comes crashing in through your senses all at once: its beauty, its absurdities, its extremes. The international airport is on an island, the largest one breaking up the mirror of Guanabara Bay. Step through the sliding glass doors and out of the air-conditioning and you are assaulted by the smell of sewage that taints the

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bay. Humidity closes in; even the walls seem to sweat. Speeding away in your taxi, you see on the left colored bits of plastic that fringe Guanabara's shore. To the right is a vast favela, its unfinished redbrick homes shielded behind acrylic panes.

You keep going. Overpasses and tunnels turn the traffic into knots. It's impossible to lay down a straight road in an urban landscape broken by lagoons, rivers, and granite facades. The same elements that make the city irresistible make it an urban-planning nightmare. You roll up your window, keeping out the diesel stench.

Then the view opens wide. Your eyes race across the miles of white sand that make up Copacabana Beach. Ipanema and Leblon, two halves of the same beach, are anchored on one end by the Dois Irmãos peaks and on the other by Arpoador, a tumble of massive boulders.

Cariocas, as Rio natives are known, are fiercely proud of their *cidade maravilhosa*, their

marvelous city. Every summer at sunset, beachgoers in Ipanema will clap as the sun dips down behind the Dois Irmãos, grateful for another day in this gorgeous, maddening place. Once I settle in, I join the crowd, reveling in the communal experience. Then I go buy a cool, green coconut to wash down the tang of ocean spray, only to have the vendor catch onto my too formal Portuguese, look up at my pallid face, and ask: "So, where are you *really* from?"

During my first year back in Rio, when I felt drained by the news or frustrated by the elusiveness of the connection I craved, I ended many of my days sitting with dozens of Cariocas on Arpoador's sun-warmed stones, watching the surfers paddle below and drinking cold beers fished from deep within the Styrofoam ice chests of passing vendors. Powerful spotlights illuminate that corner of the ocean after dark, and on sweltering evenings I often jumped in and



Residents of the Madureira neighborhood, home to two of Rio's samba schools, rehearse their samba dance in preparation for Carnaval.



Colorful spirit: The *Escadaria Selarón*, or Selarón Staircase, is a city landmark crafted with 2,000 tiles from 60 nations as a tribute to the Brazilian people by Rio-based Chilean artist Jorge Selarón.

swam past the surfers to that calm spot beyond the break. As bossa nova composer Tom Jobim famously said, “Brazil is not for beginners.” That is true. But it also is true that no existential anguish survives a half hour spent floating on your back in the Atlantic, watching the darkening summer sky.

Eventually I stopped worrying so much about belonging and just let the boundaries blur in their own time. No one else was in a hurry: Women walked slowly, hips swaying in a movement that included as much sideways swing as forward momentum. Getting a coffee could be a 15-minute ritual, if you included the obligatory chat with the barista. On park benches, bus stops, in the middle of a crowded sidewalk, couples kissed at leisure, their bodies zippered together by interlocking limbs, oblivious to crowds parting around them. I took note, eased my steps, sunk in.

As months turned to years, Rio offered up its simple pleasures: the deep-fried crunch of *bolinhos de bacalhau* (codfish croquettes) shared with friends outside Bar Urca; the chants of vendors at the Glória fruit and vegetable market on Sundays; a long, lazy picnic in the dappled shade of centenary trees at the Jardim Botânico, waiting for the occasional toucan or the tiny marmosets

that hang in the branches above, ready to swoop down for an unguarded piece of fruit.

Before I knew it, I had a favorite juice stand—you have to find your own—and favorite juices: pineapple and mint, or orange juice and collard greens. For the best acai in town, served thick, creamy, and without sugar, I belied up to Tacacá do Norte, in Flamengo. On rainy afternoons, I took in the free art exhibits at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, or whatever was on display at Gávea’s carefully curated Instituto Moreira Salles: posters from revolutionary Russia, ancient maps, turn-of-the-century photography. When I was feeling especially decadent, my boyfriend and I headed to the Bar dos Descasados, set in the garden of a boutique hotel in the bohemian Santa Teresa quarter. We lounged on daybeds, looking out over the city and sipping fusion caipirinhas made with Brazil’s favorite firewater, cachaça, macerated with lychee and basil or passion fruit and pepper.

Rio sets its own pace, and has its own priorities. You learn to love it when you give in to the city, and stop expecting the city to adjust to you.

JULIANA BARBASSA (@jbarbassa) is author of *Dancing With the Devil in the City of God*.

Where the Locals Go

You can see my city best from the **many granite peaks** that break up its urban landscape. Some of the most accessible ones are **Sugarloaf**, with its cable cars, and **Corcovado**, topped by the renowned art deco statue of “**Christ the Redeemer**.” But don’t miss a hike up to the less explored viewpoints such as **Pedra da Gávea** and **Dois Irmãos**.



Locals know to skip the crush of **Copacabana** or **Ipanema Beach** on a hot summer Sunday and instead check out cooler, less crowded parks, such as **Jardim Botânico** or **Parque Lage**.

The **Feira Híppie de Ipanema**, a fair that takes place every Sunday on General Osório Square, is the place to buy only-in-Brazil musical instruments, such as the *cuíca* and *agogô*, as well as jewelry, clothing, and art.



The foods that best represent my city are **bolinhos de bacalhau** (codfish croquettes) and crispy, deep-fried **pastéis** stuffed with meat, cheese, or shrimp. Sample them at the **Mercado São José**.

—Juliana Barbassa

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ON LOCATION

Bear Witness

This Chinese nature reserve introduces pandas to their new home—the wild

Travelers trek to China to see some of the world's wonders: the Great Wall, the terra-cotta warriors, and the iconic giant panda. Habitat destruction from industrialization and natural disasters has rendered this species endangered, with less than 2,000 left in the wild. Still, there is hope for these furry friends; a feature in *National Geographic's* August 2016 issue documents ongoing efforts by scientists at the Wolong Nature Reserve as they breed and release this legendary animal back into its natural environment. Managed by the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda, the Wolong Nature Reserve encompasses several outposts where tourists can visit and support these two-toned creatures and the teams devoted to saving them. —ALEXANDRA E. PETRI



Today's view



Tomorrow's

The greatness of a nation,
and its moral progress can be
judged by the way its animals are treated.

Mahatma Gandhi (Durban resident 1893 - 1914)



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At China's Bifengxia Base, visitors peek into the baby pandas' nursery. Opening page: A mom and cub at Wolong Reserve.

DUJIANGYAN PANDA BASE

The Dujiangyan Panda Base is an hour and a half outside Sichuan's capital of Chengdu, making it a prime spot for panda encounters since it's easily accessible to tourists. This center boasts an interactive experience not offered at any other branches of the Wolong Nature Reserve's network: the Panda Keeper Program, also known as the best babysitting gig in the world. Travelers can assist caretakers in their day-to-day work, which involves waking the pandas up, cleaning the enclosures, and preparing a feast of bamboo for meals and snacks of steamed buns and apples. During your visit, make sure to peer into the base's panda playground, particularly in the morning when China's animal ambassadors are at their most active.

GENGDA GIANT PANDA CENTER

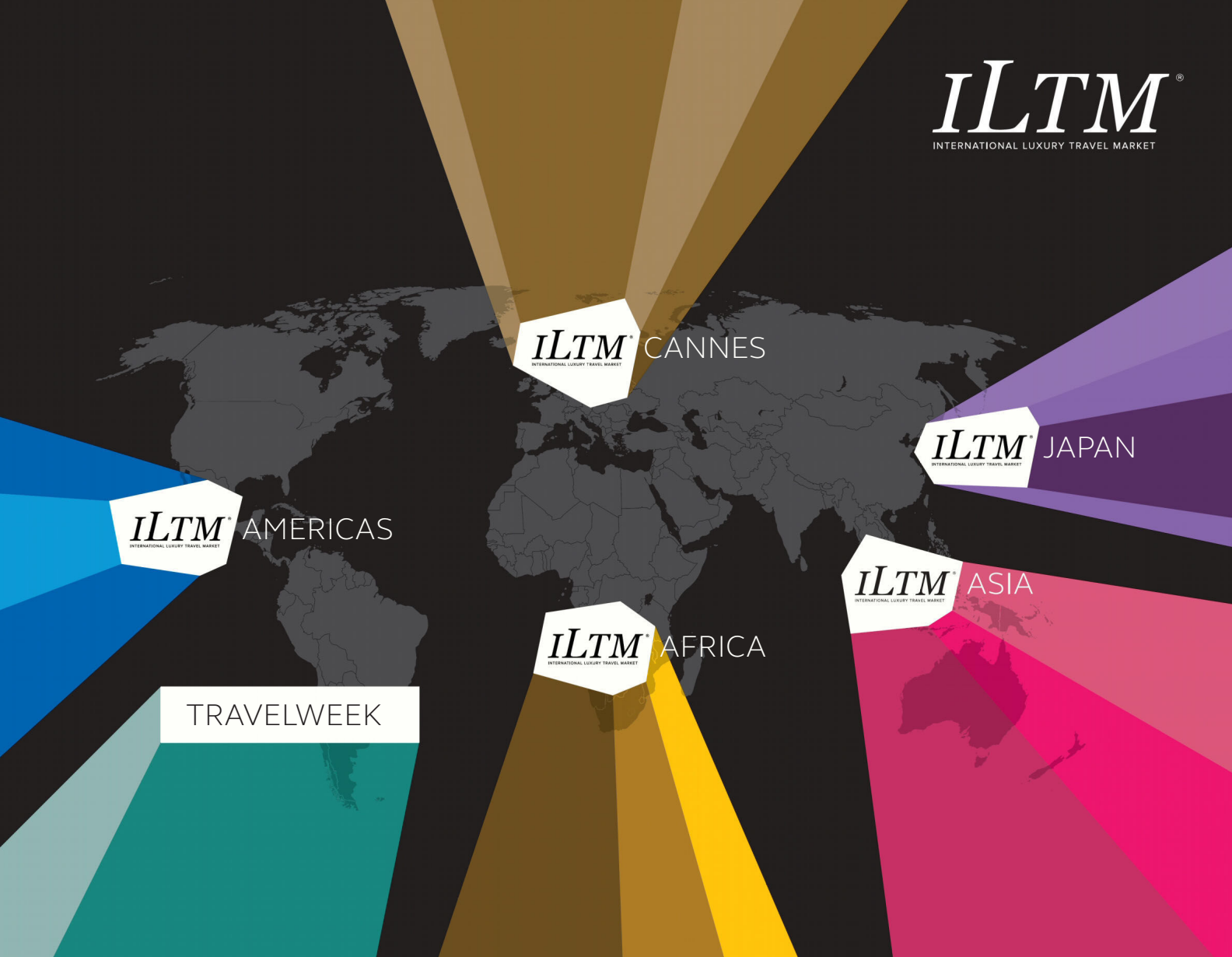
Gengda is the newest facility within the Wolong Nature Reserve, replacing a former research center devastated by the 2008 earthquake. The operations at Gengda, currently in the process of opening up to the public, include education, research, captive breeding, and teaching the giant pandas how to reintegrate into their natural habitat.



BIFENGXIA GIANT PANDA BASE

If Sichuan Province is considered Panda Nation, then the Bifengxia Giant Panda Base (or BFX) is its soul. BFX is located about 90 miles outside of Chengdu, set inside a valley laced with waterfalls. The largest outpost of the Wolong Nature Reserve, BFX became home to several giant pandas needing refuge after the Wolong panda breeding center was destroyed by the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. The sanctuary also houses a panda kindergarten, where visitors can observe caretakers as they tend, feed, and weigh the not-so-giant panda cubs, which are usually born sometime between July and September.

Two young pandas test out their tree-climbing skills at the Gengda Giant Panda Center in Chengdu, China.



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Hibernation isn't a popular option in Shizukuishi, Japan. Every year in early February, a flurry of winter wanderers descends on the ivory hills of this town for the weeklong Iwate Snow Festival. See intricate ice sculptures, sample local treats such as lamb barbecue and a sweet fermented rice drink, bask in the rainbow glow of evening fireworks, and of course, play in the snow.

Japanese photographer and National Geographic Your Shot member Masami Murooka, who's based in Iwate, captured this picture of brightly bundled children sledding down one of Koiwai Farm's snow-covered slopes.

What do we love about this image? "Right now, we're melting in the dog days of summer. Since the ground is baked and trees are drooping in the heat, we thought

we'd share a coldly delicious taste of what's to come," says Anne Farrar, *National Geographic Traveler* director of photography. "This joyful, cool-colored palette of childhood fun makes me want to run outside and play. Doubling as spots of color speckled throughout the snow, these kids are completely unaware that their chilly adventures have been forever frozen in time." —GULNAZ KHAN





The Painted Hills of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument illuminate the central Oregon landscape.

ROAD TRIP

DESERT HIGH

*Coming around the bend
in central Oregon*

Oregon has more than its fair share of craggy coastline and dense, mossy forest. So it's easy to forget that once you get east of the snow-capped Cascades Range, a good chunk of the state is high, dry, and sparsely populated. This three-day itinerary out of Bend explores Oregon's sublime high desert country, where the vistas are broad and the skies tell stories all their own.

Rock climbers know Smith Rock State Park, 26 miles north of Bend, as one of the birthplaces of modern sport climbing in the United States. Even if you're a climbing novice, it's hard not to be impressed with the cliffs of volcanic tuff and basalt soaring above the aptly named Crooked River. There's a walk-in campsite and an extensive trail network, the 7.65-mile Summit Trail Loop, open to hikers and bikers, that winds along the river before climbing almost a thousand feet. For

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Pouring pints of local microbrews at the 10 Barrel Brewing Company in Bend, Oregon

a closer look at climbers in action, take the mile-long trail up and over Misery Ridge. Keep an eye out for river otters at the bottom and golden eagles up high.

In the piney forest eight miles south of Bend, the High Desert Museum offers a concise but in-depth overview of central Oregon's natural and human history. Resident critters include porcupines, a bobcat, a Gila monster, and two river otters who are enjoying their recently updated habitat. Check the daily schedule for raptor flight demonstrations and activities at the Miller Family Ranch, where re-enactors explain life on the frontier at a model of a 1904 homestead and an authentic sawmill.

Oregon's fiery origins are etched in its jagged Cascades skyline—and also in an active shield volcano roughly the size of Rhode Island. Start your visit to Newberry National Volcanic Monument at the Lava Lands Visitor Center, eight miles south of Bend, where you can drive to the top of the perfect cinder

cone of Lava Butte for views of a 7,000-year-old lava flow. From there it's a five-minute drive to Lava River Cave, where a mile-long trail leads down into the darkness. (Bring warm clothes for the underground chill; you can rent lamps at the trailhead.) Another 45 minutes' drive south is the 17-square-mile caldera itself, now filled with two large lakes instead of molten lava. Here you'll find trailheads to 7,984-foot Paulina Peak and the Big Obsidian Flow, a mile-long hike sprinkled with black volcanic glass.



BEND HAS MORE CRAFT BREWERIES PER CAPITA THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THIS BEER-CRAZY STATE.

It's a longer drive to the Painted Hills, 85 miles northeast of Bend, but the sight of late-afternoon light on the kaleidoscopically colored slopes is something you'll never forget. They're one of three scattered units of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, where 40 million years of plant and animal evolution have been preserved in stone and soil. The nearby Thomas Condon Paleontology Center houses exhibits and a working lab where researchers pore over one of the most complete fossil records on Earth.

A cold brew may seem like a mirage after the desert, but luckily Bend has more craft breweries per capita than anywhere else in this beer-crazy state—which is about one for every 4,500 residents at last count, and that's not including distilleries or cideries. The Bend Ale Trail connects 10 breweries within a mile of downtown, including two by Deschutes Brewery, the granddaddy of them all. Most offer food on site, like the Crux Fermentation Project, with a wide lawn, picnic tables, and a taco stand out back. (Their Doublecross Strong Dark Belgian Ale packs a tasty punch.) If you would rather not drive, take a guided tour by bus or "cycle pub," a 14-passenger, pedal-powered rolling bar.

With a full day of volcano hiking and an evening of sipping local suds, you'll need to unwind in the hot tub at the Oxford Hotel, a boutique eco-hotel in the heart of historic downtown Bend. All 59 rooms face south for maximum sunlight, with French press coffeemakers and cruiser bikes available to guests—they even have loaner guitars, if you're feeling so inclined. Some suites have kitchenettes, steam showers, and balconies with views of the Cascades. —JULIAN SMITH



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PERSPECTIVE

Joy to the World

A well-traveled Dalai Lama takes us on a journey to happiness

Take it from a traveler who knows: “Trust leads to happy days and happy lives.” That’s what the Dalai Lama told me when I asked him how seeing the world can lead to peace. Short answer: Travel teaches us to trust. Strapping on a backpack as a 20-year-old, I didn’t need to search for happiness; the very act of setting out on a distant journey was bliss. As the years stacked up, the happiness of engagement with other cultures became a deeper quest. My travels led to Bhutan, drawn by that nation’s policies to encourage happiness. Visitors to the kingdom get to savor some of the results: With more than half of the country protected in national parks and

reserves, trekking through Bhutan’s meadows and majestic old-growth forests, home to rare species such as black-necked cranes and greater one-horned rhinos, will bring a lasting smile to any passionate traveler. Bhutan’s happiness checklist ranges from protecting the environment to promoting traditional heritage. Yet a national survey classified less than 50 percent of the population as happy. Even in the so-called land of happiness, being happy can prove elusive. Could it be that the clearest path to happiness is not through policy, but something more direct? “For a happy life, physical well-being is important, but true wellness must include a happy mind,” the Dalai

Lama told me. He advised that when we focus too much on problems “we can make it worse” and if we always think about what is wrong, “it appears unbearable.” By maintaining a wider perspective, “we create a lot of room to keep hope and enthusiasm.” To me, this insight means that traveling really can make the world a happier place because it forces us to trust one another. So strike out on that journey, experience cultures, and stay true to compassion. “For real happiness, a warm heart is more important than a brilliant mind. Remember that your best, most reliable friend is your own intelligence and your own warmheartedness. Let this be your guide to a happy life.” —COSTAS CHRIST

PETER HÖNNEMANN

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CHECKING IN

Follow Your Nose

Customized fragrances are among the list of sensational amenities at these hotels

HAMILTON ISLAND, AU
Qualia

Bergamot, frangipani, ylang-ylang, **hibiscus**, amber, and vanilla

A neighbor to the Great Barrier Reef and named after a Latin word meaning “of deeper sensory experience,” Qualia aims to distill Hamilton Island’s tropical landscape into its newly developed trademark scent, appropriately named the Island.



SINGAPORE
Lloyd’s Inn

Green fig, jasmine, lily of the valley, curtain creeper vine, and currant

Tucked away in Singapore’s River Valley District, Lloyd’s offers a lush, serene retreat from Orchard Road’s bustling shops and restaurants. Its scent’s fresh flora and hint of fruitiness is designed to transport guests deeper into the urban garden.



OSLO, NORWAY
The Thief

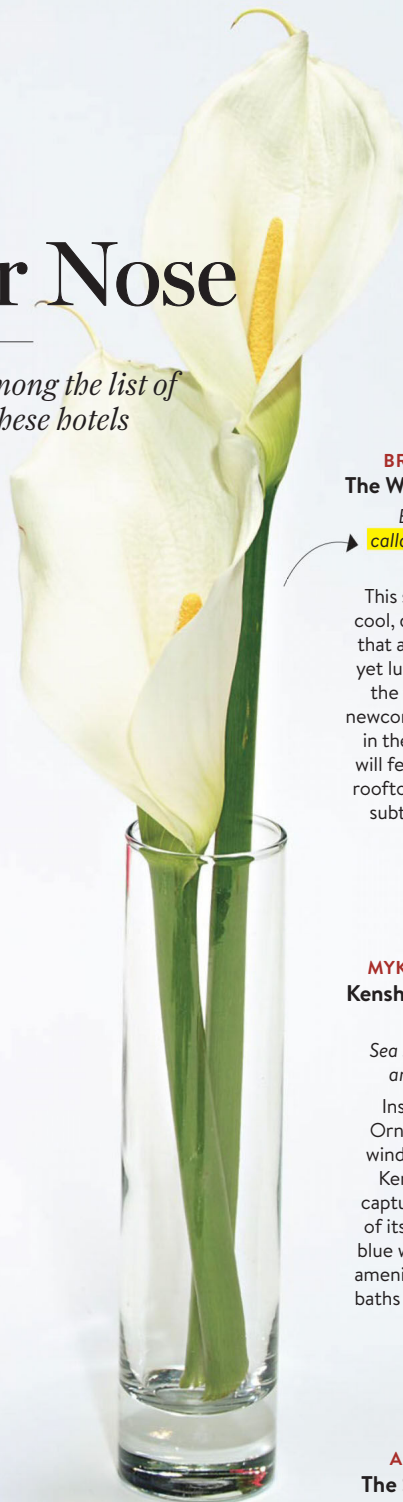
Mint, sea breeze, and freshly cut grass

Overlooking the Oslofjord and the canals of Tjuvholmen, most of the Thief’s artfully designed rooms offer panoramic views of Norway’s teal waters. It’s fitting, then, that its fragrance aims to evoke memories of sea breezes and saltwater inside the hotel’s bespoke interior.

BROOKLYN, N.Y.
The Williamsburg Hotel

Bamboo leaves, **calla lilies**, thyme, and tea leaves

This simple scent has a cool, down-to-earth vibe that at once feels bright yet luxurious—not unlike the trendy 150-room newcomer, which will open in the late summer and will feature a private bar, rooftop pool, and swanky subterranean lounge.



MYKONOS, GREECE
Kenshō Boutique Hotel & Suites

Sea salt, fresh flowers, and ocean breeze

Inspired by nearby Ornos Beach and the windmills of Mykonos, Kenshō’s fragrance captures the tranquility of its surrounding cool blue waters and relaxing amenities such as Turkish baths and Thai massages.

AUSTIN, TEXAS
The South Congress Hotel

Smoky vetiver, silver moss, crushed mint leaves, **sandalwood**, and leather

Natural regional aromas complement the boutique hotel’s retro design and textile choices such as rich leather and reclaimed wood, plus loads of funky original artwork and a motorcycle shop that rebuilds classic bikes.



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Photo: Nimmo Bay Wilderness Resort, British Columbia

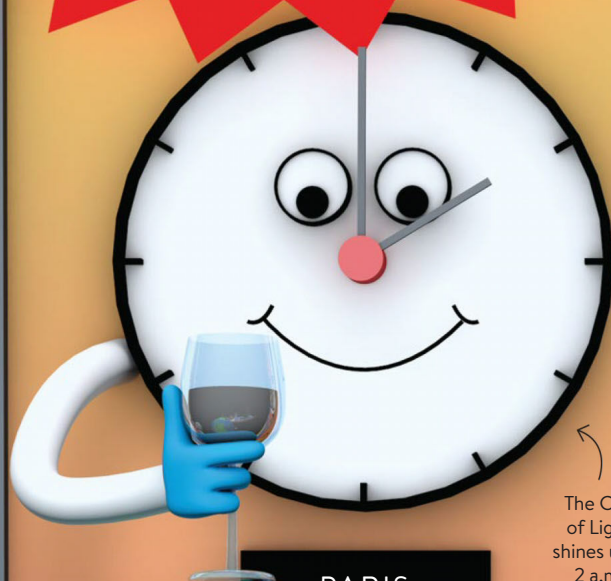
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PARTY ON AND ON AND ON...

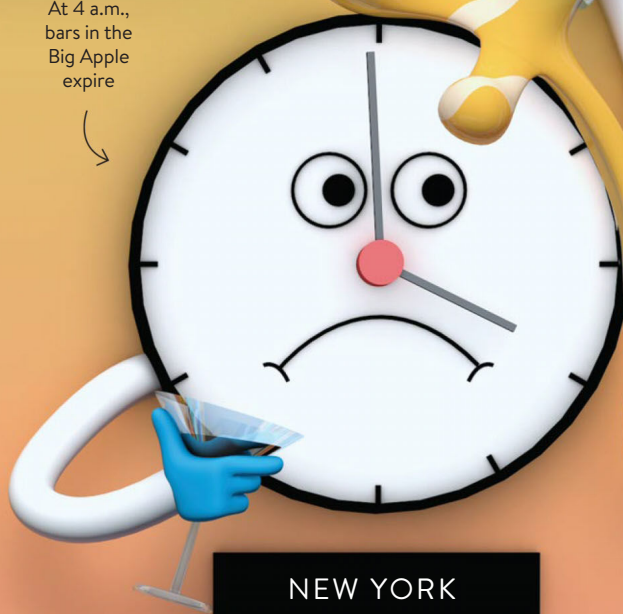
ILLUSTRATION BY JACK SACHS

YOUR ITINERARY DOESN'T HAVE TO end when the clock strikes midnight. During the early morning hours, the reverse side of a city reveals itself, unguarded, and removes the distinction between tourists and locals. Spots like Glasgow only clink pints until 1 a.m., while Buenos Aires tangos until 7 a.m. and Tel Aviv bars stay open until the last customer leaves. As communities of late-night crowds spill into the streets, hawkers offer up comfort food such as grilled squid on a stick in Shanghai and green chili ice cream in Mumbai. To aid in your late-night exploration, here's a guide to the general closing times around the world, along with the quintessential libations to toast with. You won't find a bar where everyone knows your name—and that's the best part. —HANNAH SHEINBERG

LAST CALL!



At 4 a.m.,
bars in the
Big Apple
expire



NEW YORK



Keep calm
and leave
London bars by
midnight

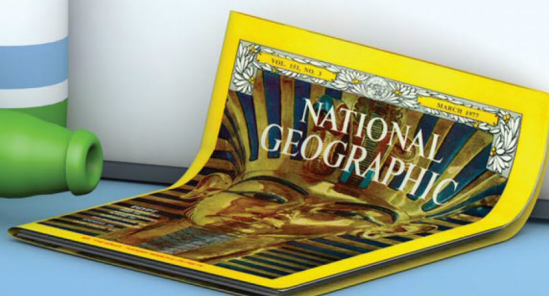


LONDON



Setting the Bar Across the Globe

WHERE TO GO NEXT	WHAT TO ORDER	LAST CALL
Glasgow, Scotland	Williams Bros. ale	1 a.m.
Rome, Italy	Frascati wine	2 a.m.
Shanghai, China	Baijiu	2 a.m.
Barcelona, Spain	Cava	3 a.m.
Montreal, Canada	Caesar	3 a.m.
Cape Town, South Africa	Pinotage wine	4 a.m.
Istanbul, Turkey	Raki	4 a.m.
Vienna, Austria	Aperol spritzer	4 a.m.
Reykjavik, Iceland	Tópas vodka	5 a.m.
Santiago, Chile	Pisco sour	5 a.m.
Tokyo, Japan	Sake	5 a.m.
Seoul, South Korea	Soju	6 a.m.
Buenos Aires, Argentina	Fernet and Coke	7 a.m.
Tel Aviv, Israel	Arak	No last call



SMART CITIES

Austin Unlimited

Eleven reasons to celebrate the innovative Texas capital

Austin used to be known as Texas' progressive pocket and a slacker paradise where musicians, artists, and postgrads on shoestring budgets could comfortably "get stuck." Today, the fastest growing city in the U.S. is frequently referred to as "the Silicon Valley of the South" (or that place

where your friends from Brooklyn just moved to open a vegan-friendly, gluten-free food truck). Austin has attracted a slew of start-ups, 6,000 high-tech companies, and a billion dollars in annual investments that keep the city's creative culture and productive potential on the rise. —RAMONA FLUME



1 Austin ranks as one of the top 20 fittest cities in America, with 48 percent of residents living within walking distance of a park. Around 14 percent of the city is an urban green space, including the popular Lady Bird Lake.

2 Entrepreneurs flock to Austin partly because of success stories like Mikaila Ulmer, the industrious pre-teen CEO who recently scored an \$11 million deal with Whole Foods to sell her organic juice line, Me & the Bees Lemonade.

3 There's no escaping Austin's music scene—even underwater. The new Hotel Van Zandt is a chic salute to the Live Music Capital of the World, outfitted with wow factors like an underwater sound system in the rooftop pool.

4 Travelers can still find Lone Star tallboys in almost any local bar, but craft beer is a thriving industry. The city's dotted with renegade brewers and new operations like the Blue Owl Brewery, which invented a "souring unit" scale to measure the lactic acid content of their sour-mashed beers.

5 Everyone complains about Austin's mosquitoes, but nobody minds the urban bat colony. Maybe that's because 1.5 million bats emerge from the Congress Avenue Bridge every night (March through November) to consume as much as 20,000 pounds of insects.

6 Austin's infamous battle against traffic is making strides despite enduring gridlock. It's now home to a fleet of self-driving cars and the B-cycle bike-share has exponentially increased access and affordability citywide. Nearly 100,000 riders use B-cycle, which has offset 1.1 million pounds of carbon since its launch.



7 A swim at Barton Springs is a holy rite for Austinites. So when the population of an endemic salamander species plummeted in the spring-fed pool during the 1990s, local devotees fought to list it as endangered. Federal protection in 1997 led to large-scale conservation initiatives that preserve the springs to this day.

8 The indie game community is a decentralized magnet for the city's most talented developers. The independent collective Juegos Rancheros hosts monthly interactive showcases and events like Fantastic Arcade, a free gaming festival held every September.

9 Aspects of Austin's film industry have achieved mainstream notoriety, from SXSW to Matthew McConaughey, but the capital's love of all things fringe and far-out is celebrated at Fantastic Fest (September), the annual festival dedicated to horror, sci-fi, fantasy, and cult films.

10 High-rises are a dime a dozen, but classic music venues are sacred. The Broken Spoke, the historic honky-tonk, still operates (in between apartment buildings) and a revamped Antone's, "Austin's home of the blues," recently reopened three blocks from its original Sixth Street location.

11 International acclaim continues to nourish Austin's rip-roaring culinary scene, but the city's boldest talents keep their focus hyper-local. The entire concept behind new restaurant Emmer & Rye's daily menu rotation, nose-to-tail butchery, and in-house fermentation program is designed to support area producers, farmers, and ranchers.

Clockwise from top left: The Broken Spoke, recently opened Hotel Van Zandt, leftover barbecue, Amy's Ice Creams, food truck at the Picnic, live music at the Continental Club. Opposite page: Stand-up paddleboards on Lady Bird Lake.



Vincent van Gogh's drawing (bottom) is re-created in Nuenen, Netherlands.

PASSIONS

DIFFERENT STROKES

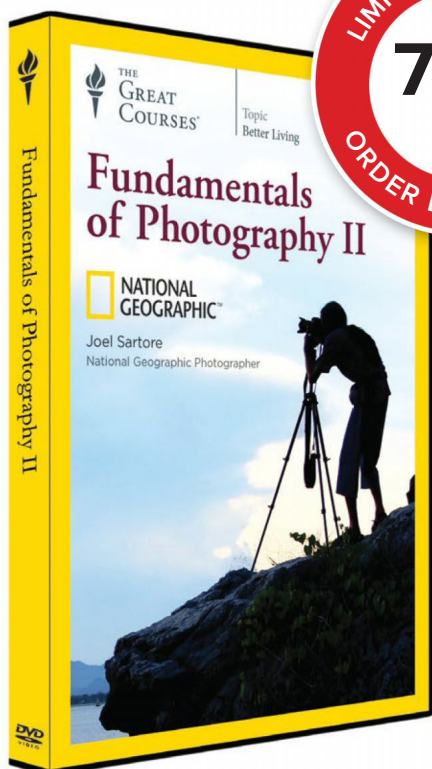
Two photographers retrace the steps of Europe's famous artists



To capture the essence of master painters, Dan Bannino shot outside the lines. The Italian photographer pilgrimaged to 22 European cities and towns for his Eye of the Artist series, a collection of photos from the perspective of 10 famous artists, from Pablo Picasso to Paul Cézanne. “I wanted to eat their food, smell the air, see the same colors that they had in their eyes,” says Bannino.

In Albi, France, Bannino visited the church Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was baptized in and met with the artist’s last living relative at the family castle, Château du Bosc. He based his Toulouse-Lautrec photo on a story about how the French painter filled water glasses with fish so guests would be forced to drink wine at his parties. Other stops included Dalí’s favorite restaurant and impromptu performance space in Spain’s Costa Brava region, and Renoir’s retirement home in Cagnes-sur-Mer, France, where he continued to paint despite crippling rheumatism. Els Quatre Gats, Picasso’s Barcelona café hangout that still uses the menu cover that the surrealist designed, inspired the backdrop of Bannino’s Picasso-themed image, which also features another museum name—Rothko, Bannino’s canine travel companion.

Photographer and *Traveler* contributor Jurjen Drenth traveled around France and Holland for similar projects on Vermeer, Rembrandt, and van Gogh. He re-created van Gogh’s gritty “Potato Eaters” with a Dutch family in their kitchen. His advice for artful itineraries? “Read about and see the works before you go, to get deeper into the artist’s world.” —HANNAH SHEINBERG



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8. Taking Studio Lights Outdoors
9. Human Portrait Photography
10. Animal Photography
11. Night Photography
12. Art Photography: Perspective and Illusions
13. Art Photography: Having Fun
14. Art Photography: Still Life
15. Black-and-White Photography
16. Elevating Your Perspective: Photos from Above
17. Smartphone Photography
18. The Decisive Moment in Photography
19. Live Event Photography: Farmers' Market
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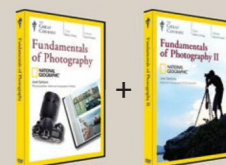
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DUBLIN WRITERS MUSEUM

Letters, rare editions, portraits, and other memorabilia from the likes of Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, Shaw, Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett fill this 18th-century mansion. The Michelin-starred restaurant Chapter One occupies its basement level. writersmuseum.com

JAMES JOYCE CENTRE

Far from a stuffy memorial to the literary cult figure, the center hosts weekly Joyce-themed walks, spearheads the annual Bloomsday festival, and welcomes guest readers as starry as Stephen Fry. jamesjoyce.ie

TRINITY COLLEGE

Take a student-guided walking tour around this prestigious 16th-century university, home to the largest library in Ireland and the illuminated ninth-century Gospel manuscript, the Book of Kells. tcd.ie/visitors/book-of-kells

SWENY'S PHARMACY

Daily Joyce readings take place at this former pharmacy where *Ulysses*' Leopold Bloom famously buys lemon-scented soap. sweny.ie

ST. PATRICK'S

Dublin's 13th-century cathedral, one of the city's few remaining medieval buildings, is a pilgrimage spot for fans of satirist and poet Jonathan Swift, who was also a dean of the cathedral. stpatrickscathedral.ie

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

Its holdings include the largest collection of W. B. Yeats manuscripts in the world, donated by the Yeats family. www.nli.ie

For the full literary lowdown: dublincityofliterature.ie

REPORTED BY SARAH BARRELL, IN COLLABORATION WITH NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER (UK)

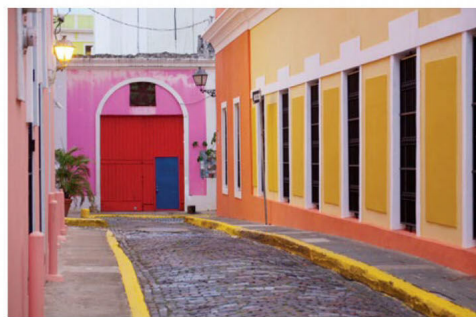
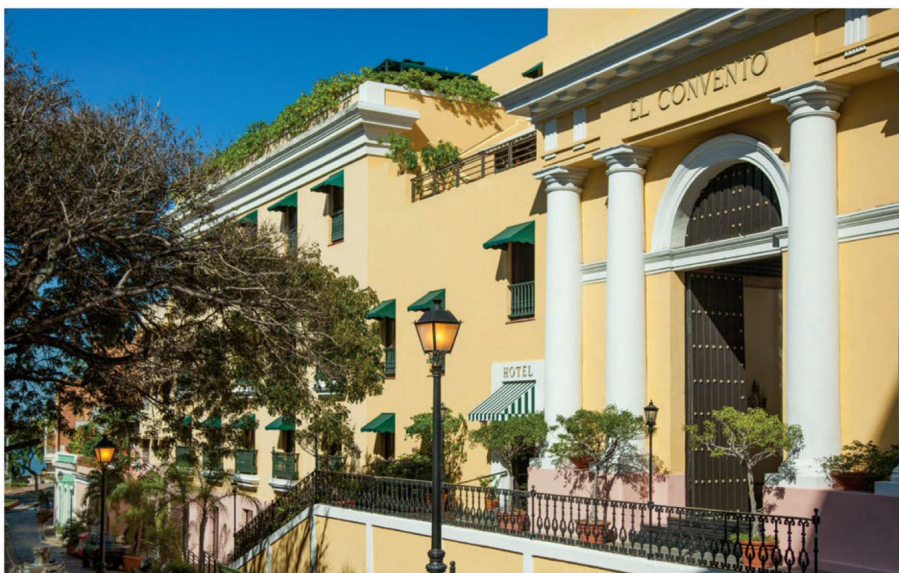
Birthplace of James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, and Samuel Beckett, Dublin has more literary landmarks than most cities. Some serve double-duty: The Duke is an 1822 bar and the starting point for the Literary Pub Crawl, a walking tour of historic, author-friendly pubs. In 2010 UNESCO named the Irish capital to its list of Cities of Literature—of which contemporary author Joseph O'Connor commented, "To describe Dublin as a City of Literature would be like saying rain sometimes falls in Ireland."

LITERARY TRAVELS

DUBLIN

A portrait of the city as a book lover's nirvana

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See how a pro finds perfect light and anticipates great moments both on location and in classroom sessions. All participants should bring a digital camera and laptop computer for downloading and editing photos taken in the field.



ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER:

National Geographic photographer and former director of photography for *National Geographic Traveler* for 15 years, Dan Westergren was responsible for the magazine's award-winning photographic vision. He is also an experienced teacher, having led workshops for National Geographic all over the world.

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Learn how new stoves can improve living conditions for Maasai villagers while mitigating environmental damage on this seven-day trip led by National Geographic Journeys with G Adventures, a supporter of the Maasai Stoves & Solar Project, which works to replace indoor cooking fires with stoves that burn fuel more efficiently. Visitors may partner with Maasai women and lay down a few bricks for a healthier future. From \$3,499 per person.

LICENSED TO THRILL

ICONIC INDIA

A 14-day itinerary covering the Taj Mahal and other India highlights also champions two causes: Women on Wheels, which helps women obtain driver's licenses for chauffeur jobs (women with the program pick up trip participants at the airport); and the New Delhi Streetkids Project, which hires homeless youths to give guided tours of New Delhi slums (proceeds help fund school tuitions). From \$2,299 per person.

IT TAKES A MAYA VILLAGE

GUATEMALA JOURNEY

This eight-day trip, which travels from Antigua to Flores and Tikal, includes a day around San Juan la Laguna, a G Adventures-supported community along Lake Atitlán. Here travelers learn about Guatemala's Maya roots, visit local textile-weaving cooperatives, enjoy a traditional feast prepared by villagers, and attend a ceremonial Maya tree planting. From \$1,299 per person.

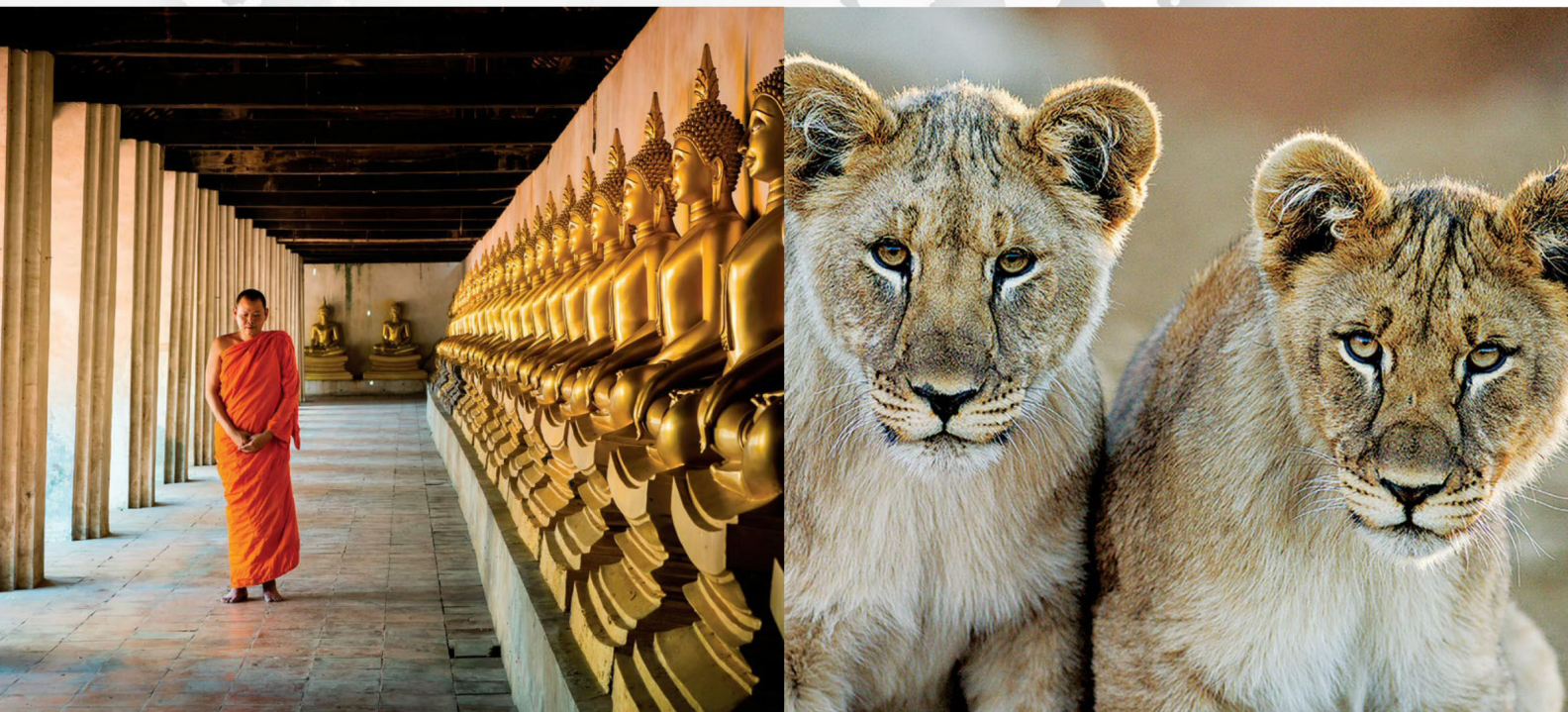
—ALEXANDRA E. PETRI

PACO DE LA LUZ/PACOGRAFIE

Old ways, new day:
Maasai family members
pause near their village
in northern Tanzania.

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Costas Christ
World Legacy Awards Chairman
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PURSUITS OF



Recharge your chi in **TAIPEI**, page 40 • Chase beauty and sip Chianti in **TUSCANY**, page 58



Feel your best with our **BLISS INDEX**, page 65 • Dance in the streets to steel-pan beats in **TRINIDAD**, page 70



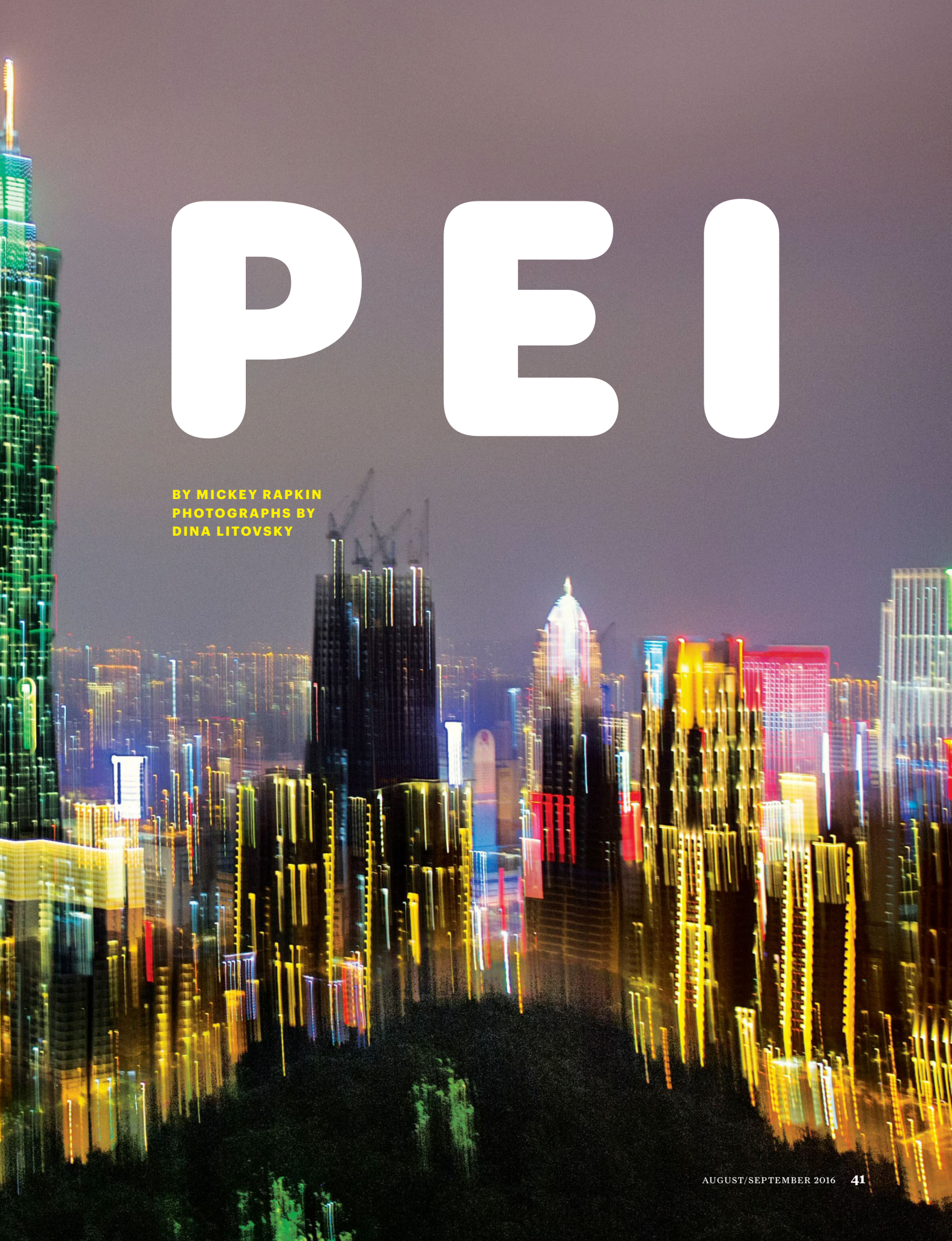
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDREW JOYCE

TAI

THE GETAWAY GAME

A mad dash to Taiwan for 72 hours of dragons
and dumplings in a city that soars.

For the best view of
towering Taipei 101
and the city skyline,
head to the top of
Elephant Mountain.



PEI

BY MICKEY RAPKIN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
DINA LITOVSKY

Taipei's famous night markets are inexpensive and best treated as an all-you-can-eat buffet. At Raohe Street Night Market, in the Songshan District, dozens of food stalls sell local fare such as noodle soups, sausages, stinky tofu, and bubble tea.



廟口豬血糕

30年老攤



祝松山慈

財法人台北市
松山慈祐宮

台北市松山慈祐宮

楊梅國光市台北松山慈祐宮

30年老攤

7am

DUDE, WHERE'S MY HOTEL?

→ I show the cab driver my hotel on my phone's map, but the address appears only in English. He pulls over to try to figure things out. Frustrated, he whips out his own iPhone, calls up the Google Translate app, and speaks into it in his native tongue. It translates his words directly into English. It doesn't work perfectly—unless he really does want to “melt me down”—but soon we find the hotel. This was some real *Star Trek* shit. Traveling to Asia can be humbling in the best way.



9 am Caffeine!

→ Taipei's coffee culture dates back to the Japanese occupation; hence the vintage Japanese siphon equipment on display at one of the city's original coffeehouses, Fong Da, which opened in 1956. But the full Nordic caffeine experience is on offer at Fika Fika Café, in the Zhongshan District, where single-origin brews are served in a minimalist setting straight out of *Kinfolk* magazine. Barista Taylor Kuo is serious about her macchiato. When I leave mine on the counter a beat too long, she insists on brewing me a new cup so I can enjoy it the only way one should: piping hot. Pair it with a piece of house-made “rabbit cake,” which is a pretty awesome name for carrot cake.

9:48 am Marvel at the MRT

→ Taipei's subway system (MRT) is only 20 years old but it's intuitive and clean and (best of all) cheap—between NT \$20-\$65 per ride. (That's about two U.S. dollars for the longest trip.) The locals wait in single-file lines for the train and a whimsical jingle plays when the thing approaches, sort of like the neighborhood ice-cream truck.

10:25 am MOBBED AT ART CENTRAL

→ The National Palace Museum is home to, arguably, the finest Chinese art in the world, a 1,000-year-old collection culled from China's emperors. (Check out the Ju ware porcelain, among the rarest anywhere.) The museum is Taipei's answer to the Louvre—and just as crowded. Chinese tourists swarm the building, making it tough to navigate. A friend later comments on the flood of mainland Chinese visitors, joking: “Chiang Kai-shek stole their art. They'd like to see it again.”



12:30 pm Perfect Noodles

→ It's time to hit Yong Kang Beef Noodles, a family-owned dive (and favorite of Anthony Bourdain) that's been serving up Taipei's savory bowls since 1963. The line at Yong Kang is already out the door but I'm seated quickly, sharing a small table alongside two college students from mainland China. I skip the “steam hog large intestines” and opt for a bowl of the half-cattle tendon/half beef noodles in a Sichuan-style hot broth. The tender meat falls apart on my fork.



11:48 am *At the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, I catch the changing of the guard, an hourly affair where soldiers move with the precision of Beyoncé.*



1:11 pm

IN THE PRESENCE OF GREATNESS

→ Hsing Tian Kong Temple, in the Zhongshan District, welcomes about 10,000 visitors every day. I approach a temple helper, an elderly woman dressed in a *qipao*, a traditional robe in baby blue with a high collar. She looks like Estelle Getty from *The Golden Girls* and she offers to cleanse my soul. She asks me my name and proceeds to shake burning incense all around me. I admit, I sometimes struggle with the existence of God. Yet her kindness and grace are so overwhelming that I find myself on the verge of tears. Hsing Tian Kong Temple is dedicated to Guan Yu, the patron god of businessmen; visitors come daily to have their fortune interpreted. After choosing a stick with a number on it, I head inside where a man dressed in a robe interprets the Chinese characters on my fortune. “What did you ask the savior?” he says. “Um, I recently moved to Los Angeles,” I say, “and things haven’t been working out exactly as I’d planned. Did I make a mistake?” He nods his head then looks at the slip of paper. I am totally dazed but I remember him saying: “You have to open your heart. Dig deeper.”

2:47 pm

Tea With a Master

→ Still thinking about Life’s Big Question, I make my way to Dihua Street—one of the oldest thoroughfares in town. I stumble into a tea shop called Chen Wey Cha Yuan, where an aging shopkeeper takes a break from his calligraphy to brew a pot of DongDing oolong tea (which tastes almost milky). He answers questions patiently, then unwraps a cheesecloth to reveal a prize: a rare tea called Oriental Beauty.



11:17 pm

Gone Shrimping



→ I am on Zhishan Road in an open-air building, seated by a giant pool trying to catch live shrimp with a cheap wooden pole. I’m hardly alone. Men and women of various ages sit beside me on plastic chairs, nearly three dozen in all, fishing rods dangling in the water. The ponytailed man who rents me the rod shows me how to bait the hook with a piece of liver. Two girls in sweatpants laugh at me as the slippery liver escapes my hands. The man does it for me, then throws the lure in the water. I wait. Then I wait some more. I’m actually about to quit when I feel a tug. I’m ashamed to admit this next part but, when I pull the shrimp from the water, I’m afraid to touch the thing—which squirms like crazy. One of the girls grabs the crustacean with her bare hands and drops it in my bag.



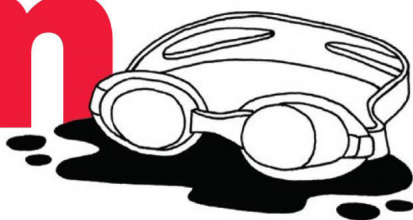


There are thousands of temples in Taipei, and they come in all sizes. Some are crammed into a kiosk the size of an ATM and some take flight over gray sidewalks.

DAY TWO

8 am

POOL MEDITATION



→ Jet lag! I reset my body clock with a dip in the pool at my hotel, Humble House, a 235-room boutique property in the commercial Xinyi District. The outdoor pool is an oasis of cool in the center of an industrial playground. I do laps in the shadow of Taipei 101, a 1,670-foot-tall skyscraper that was the tallest building in the world from 2004 until 2010. (It's still pretty tall.) Staring up at all that steel and glass around me I find myself meditating on one famous rabbi's teachings: "I am but dust and ashes. For my sake was the world created."

9:30 am

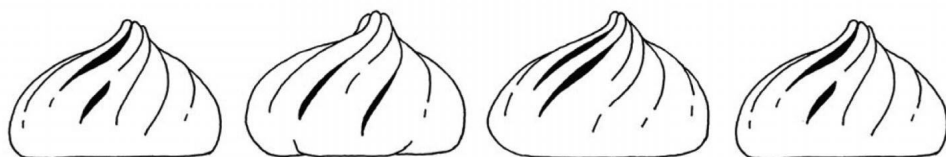
Wheels of Fortune

→ Taipei's bike-share program, YouBike (15 cents for the first 30 minutes), was expanded significantly in 2015 and there is no better way to see the city, provided you don't mind pedaling through thick, steamy heat. Worthwhile stops: Daan Park (Taipei's Central Park), Songshan Cultural and Creative Park (home to Taiwan's Design Museum), Jianguo Holiday Flower Market (open weekends), and Dajia Riverside Park.



"Soup dumplings, sitcoms, one-night stands—good ones leave you wanting more."

—Eddie Huang, Taiwanese-American chef and author of *Fresh Off the Boat*



11:32 am Delicious

→ Lunch of steamed soup dumplings (or *xiao long bao*) at the original Din Tai Fung, a global eatery with an unlikely origin story. Din Tai Fung opened in the Daan District here in 1958 as a retail shop selling cooking oil, but when interest in the oil tanked in the early 1970s, Din Tai Fung was reborn as a steamed dumpling and noodle joint. While traditional Shanghai dumplings can be heavy, you can see the soup swimming inside these delicate pouches of dough. The secret supposedly lies in its 18 folds.

12:47 pm

SHOPPING HAPPENS

→ The best Taipei afternoons are spent exploring the city's skinny alleyways, packed with gems like Boven—a subterranean library stashing current and vintage fashion magazines and architecture titles dating back to the 1960s. This is the ultimate hipster hangout; NT \$300 (US \$9) gets you access to the reading room. Continue the cool-kid crawl with a stop at Take5, which trades in the best Japanese selva denim. Then go treasure hunting at 70s Vintage, a perfectly edited secondhand shop in the Daan District selling lived-in Levi's, aged Barbour jackets, and a slim retro Patagonia raincoat I somehow thought I could survive without—but am now hunting for on eBay.

6:12 pm In the Zone

→ Ximending Pedestrian Zone is a mash-up of New York's Times Square and Tokyo's Harajuku area: all bright lights and big gritty, home to fashion-conscious youth on parade. Lose yourself in Taipei's famous Tattoo Street, lined with ink parlors. Or park on the street, get a bubble tea, and watch a flash mob of local kids in pink T-shirts hawking some product. Is that the music pumping or the city's for-real pulse?

11:12 pm Beverages!

→ At Double Check, a dimly lit bar where the only thing cooler than the music is the beer on tap, a friend of a friend presents me with an only-in-Asia beverage: a fresh coconut that's been outfitted with a metal pop-top from a soda can. It's a Frankenstein of a drink. My head is spinning.



12:30 am Sad Love Songs

→ Karaoke is the national pastime—especially in the dead of summer when the air is so stifling one can only survive indoors. At CashBox—in a 15-story office building open 24 hours a day and teeming with private karaoke rooms—my new friends chain-smoke indoors while singing Maroon 5 songs before launching into a marathon of depressing Chinese ballads. While Americans favor cheesy '80s songs at karaoke, pal Duke Wu explains, the locals here are all about sad love songs sung with zero irony. Someone picks a phone off the wall, and a waiter magically enters with beers, Glenlivet Scotch, and dumplings. We eat, drink, and sing for hours. I love this city.

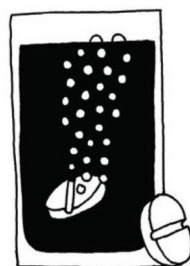
The waitresses at Club Omni rain down fake money on a table of nightclubbers. Each bottle of champagne is delivered by its own waitress. Order seven bottles, and seven women appear.





10 am

GET OUTTA TOWN



→ I force myself out of bed and take the MRT to Xinbeitou station en route to Beitou's celebrated hot springs, a 50-minute ride that works like a time machine, depositing you in a natural theme park formed by volcanic rock. Beitou, an area built out by the Japanese during the 50 years they occupied Taiwan, is rumored to have been home to brothels for visiting soldiers. While there's a public hot spring in town, open to anyone in a bathing suit, I go for the complete Japanese *onsen* experience at Villa 32, a boutique hotel and Zen retreat. It's raining outside—a glorious downpour that only adds to the contemplative solitude of Villa 32's eight pools of therapeutic water bubbling up from the Earth's depths.



5:19 pm

Tall Things

→ After a quick change at the hotel, I take advantage of the clear skies and visit Taipei 101, riding one of the world's fastest elevators up to the 89th-floor observatory. Though I instantly remember just how afraid I am of heights and immediately take the next elevator back down to Earth. I head next to Elephant Mountain, one of Taipei's "Four Beasts" mountains. The hike is short and steep but seriously rewarding: After a 20-minute uphill climb, mostly on wooden steps, I come upon the most Instagrammable views in all of Taipei. Neon lights below flicker to life. A breeze comes in. It feels like the city is just waking up. Which means it's time to...

1:46 pm

So Hot Right Now

→ Exfoliated and relaxed I dry off and visit the scenic Thermal Valley—where the steam is so thick you can barely see two feet in front of you. The valley floor can reach 194 degrees Fahrenheit. Not too long ago, locals actually boiled eggs in a stone sink filled with hot spring water.



3:17 pm

#BLESSED

→ Before I head back, I stop at Taipei's most blessed site: the Nung Chan Monastery, a Buddhist temple designed by Kris Yao of Taipei's Archtech Inc., inspired by "a flower in sky, moon in water." A note on the sky: Taipei suffers from a smog problem, nowhere near the magnitude of Beijing but noticeable. The flood of motor scooters in the city is partly to blame. Thankfully the early morning rain washed away the particulates, and the sky is blue as a whale.

8 pm Salad in a Bag

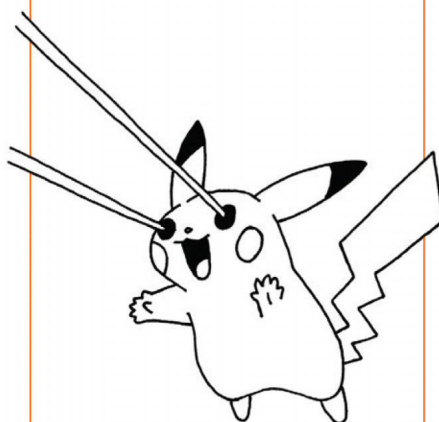
→ ...take it to the streets. At Tonghua Night Market, a smaller, off-the-beaten-track fair, I'm joined by Kathy Cheng, a local writer. We sip glass jelly—a drink made from some kind of Chinese mint, dark as night and tasting vaguely of licorice—and pass unlikely food carts, including one selling basically salad in a bag. I doubt there's a better bite in town than the peppery sausage on a stick I eat here, sliced down the center and served piping hot.



Day or night, biking may be the best way to explore the city.

Midnight

I leave my comfort zone firmly behind and hit Club Omni, a serious nightclub (Skrillex has spun here) where I dance for hours. Four Pikachus on stage shoot laser beams out of their eyes as Taiwanese rich kids and expense-account warriors from abroad order bottles of Moët. It's the perfect mind-reset.



DEPARTURE

Noon

Question Answered

→ I revisit Din Tai Fung to make sure the soup dumplings are as good as I'd remembered (they are). When I board a 14-hour flight home to Los Angeles I'm still thinking about that moment at the temple when the Taiwanese Estelle Getty rocked my world. Had I made a mistake in uprooting my life and career to move west? Maybe there are no mistakes. There are only roads diverging into the future. Open your heart. Dig deeper.



We heart Taipei: Love locks hang from a metal art installation overlooking Rainbow Bridge.





Where to Stay

Humble House Taipei

TAIPEI CITY HALL STATION

This 235-room boutique hotel near the Taipei 101 skyscraper is celebrated for its eco-friendly LEED certification and clean lines. Come for the linens, stay for the outdoor pool—the best escape from Taipei’s extreme humidity. From \$170. humblehousehotels.com

Villa 32

BEITOU

A sleek mountain retreat in the hot springs hub of Beitou, Villa 32 offers five elegant suites for overnight stays but is also open to the public for soaks in its eight pools of thermal water (\$50 for four hours). Suites from \$614 (includes one hot spring tub and one cold spring tub). villa32.com

Where to Eat & Drink

Shilin Night Market

JIANTAN STATION

With more than 500 food stalls, Shilin is one of the largest night markets in Taipei. Sticky tofu, stir-fried innards, sausage encased in sticky rice, deep-fried chicken steak on a stick? It’s all here. shilin-night-market.com

Ounce

XINYI ANHE STATION

A speakeasy tucked in the back of an unassuming café in the Daan District, Ounce is perfectly cozy. The red-themed room seats maybe 30 guests. Bartenders mix special cocktails, such as a “Snake in the Grass,” made with bitter melon syrup, a house-made spiced tincture, and *rhum agricole* (made with cane juice).

Alchemy

XIANGSHAN STATION

Another speakeasy (look for the hidden entrance behind a bookshelf at the Marquee lounge), Alchemy comes with a live jazz band and a no-standing policy. Uniformed bartenders display the kind of showmanship that lands Alchemy on lists of the best bars in Asia.

Top Picks in Taipei

National Palace Museum

SHILIN STATION

Its collection is a mother lode of nearly 700,000 paintings, ceramics, sculptures, and calligraphy from ancient Chinese dynasties, which Chiang Kai-shek rescued (or stole, depending on whom you ask) before the Cultural Revolution. In addition to rare 12th-century Ju ware pottery, highlights include an exquisite miniature bok choy cabbage carved from a single piece of jadeite. npm.gov.tw

Longshan Temple

LONGSHAN TEMPLE STATION

More than a hundred deities are worshipped at this temple known as the “meeting place of the gods.” At least one of those must be the god of immortality, because the place has been destroyed at least three times—by earthquake, typhoon, and a World War II bombing. Consider your own resiliency, then take a deep breath. There’s more incense burning here than at a Phish concert. lungshan.org.tw

Addiction Aquatic Development

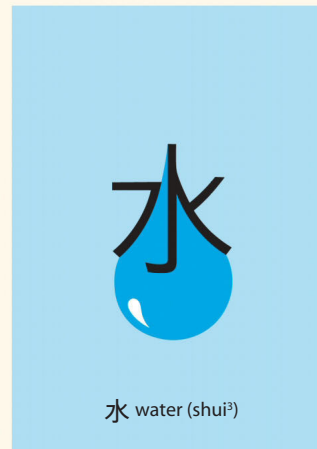
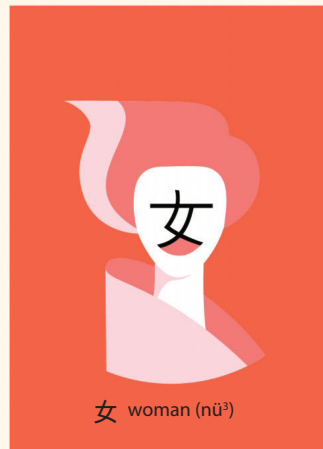
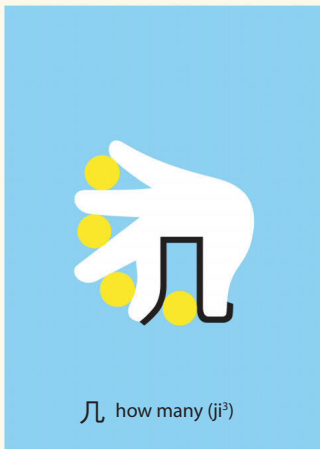
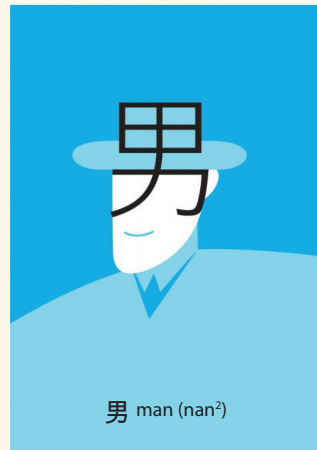
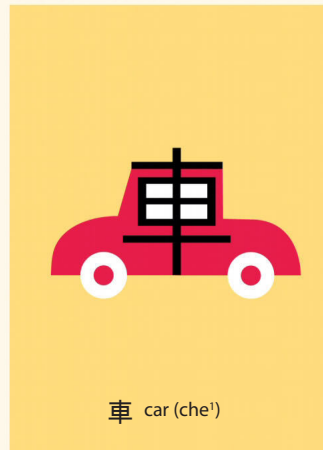
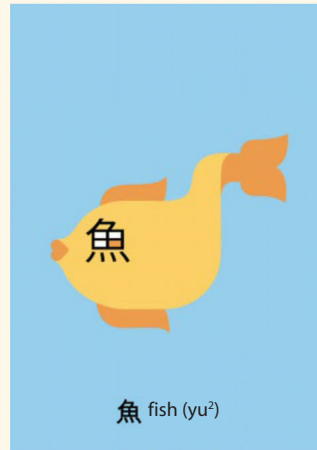
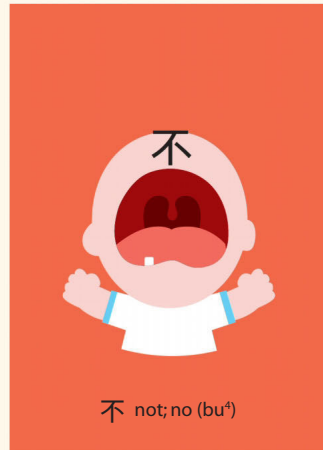
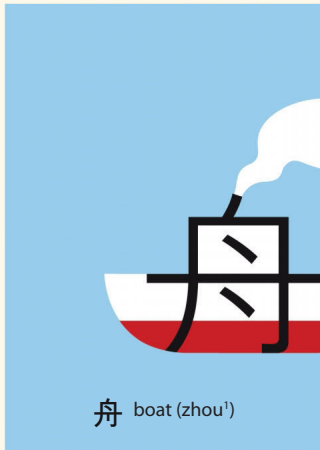
XINGTIAN TEMPLE STATION

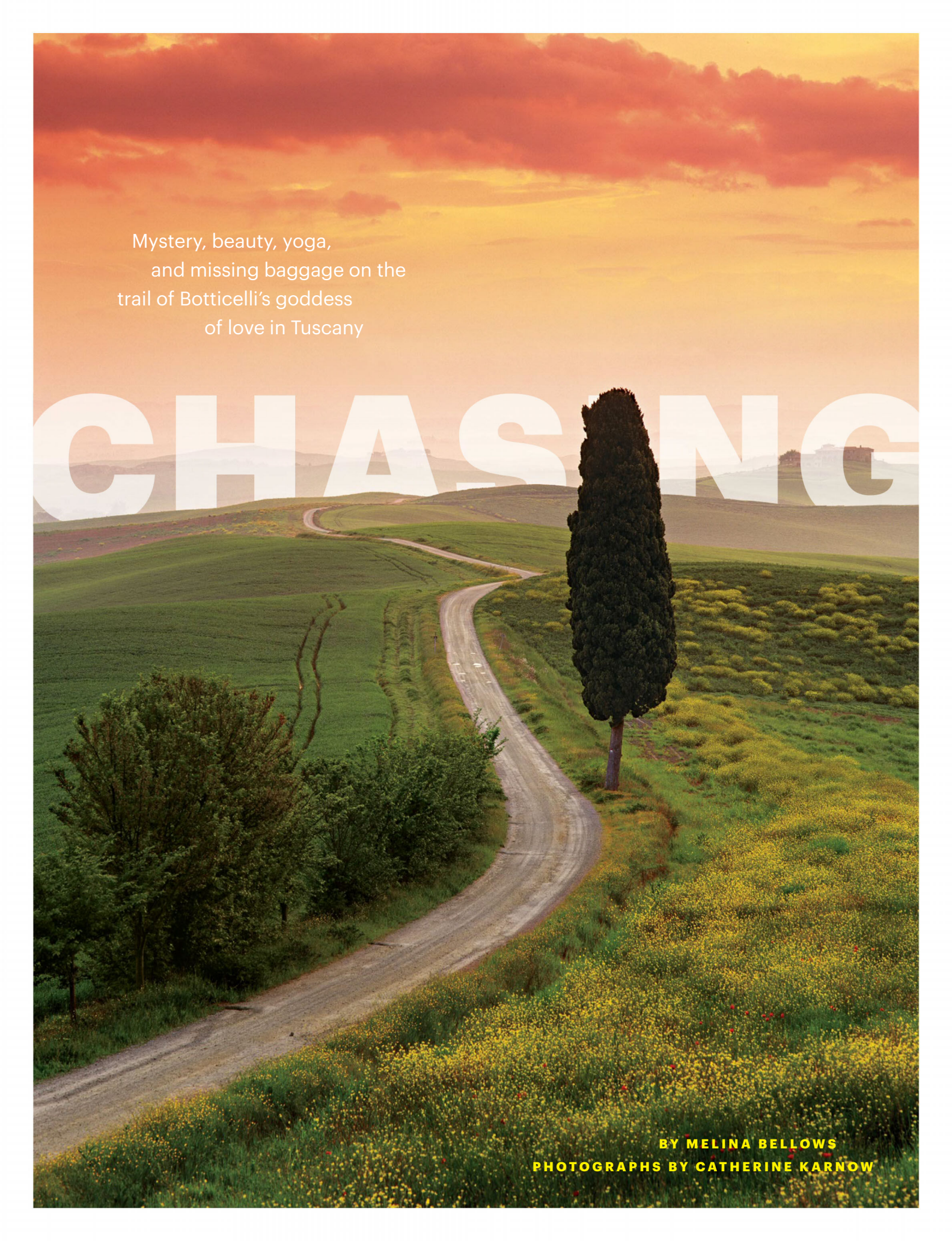
Formerly known as the Taipei Fish Market, this is 20,000 square feet of seafood spectacle complete with a high-end grocery and flower market. Walk past stainless steel tanks full of live crabs to find the standing sushi bar serving (relatively cheap) fatty salmon sashimi. Or select your favorite fresh fish from a tank and have it grilled on demand. www.addiction.com.tw

MICKEY RAPKIN (@mickeyrapkin) is a journalist and screenwriter whose book *Pitch Perfect* inspired the franchise. Of his introduction to Taipei karaoke he says, “I love a crowd that doesn’t just appreciate a weepy ballad but actually demands it.” This is New York City-based photographer DINA LITOVSKY’s first feature for *Traveler* (@dina_litovsky).

Colorful Characters to Know

Taiwanese entrepreneur ShaoLan developed the bestselling Chineasy method as a way for her two U.K.-born children to learn Mandarin. Chineasy breaks down the language into building blocks, teaching the story behind each character and using memorable graphic illustrations by Noma Bar. Her latest book, *Chineasy Everyday*, was published in May and includes a chapter devoted to travel. Here are 12 words to help you rent a car, go shopping, and order some fried chicken on a stick.



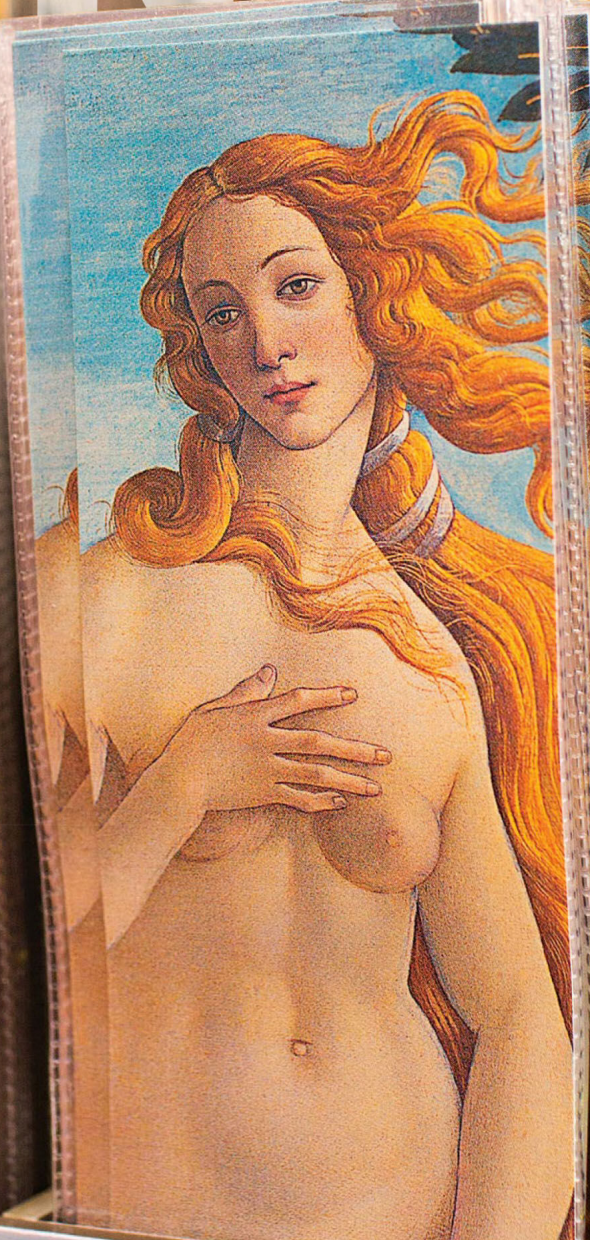


Mystery, beauty, yoga,
and missing baggage on the
trail of Botticelli's goddess
of love in Tuscany

CHASING

BY MELINA BELLWS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHERINE KARNOW

VENUS



Happiness is a solitary track and a lone cypress tree in Tuscany. Botticelli's Venus reigns at an Uffizi Gallery gift shop, in Florence.

F

or the past five years, a poster of Sandro Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" on my office wall has intrigued me. I stare at the Venus on the Half-Shell and sense that she wants to tell me something. But what? Does she have a secret? Some ancient wisdom to soothe my 21st-century,

working-mother soul? I imagine what the goddess of love might say if we met at the corner coffee shop. Pulling myself back to reality, I add viewing the Renaissance painting to my bucket list.

One day while walking in downtown D.C., I spot something shiny on the ground. Never one to overlook a free dime or single earring, I stoop to pick it up. It's a small silver charm with a figure I can't make out on one side and, on the other, a large M with "Italy" stamped beneath it. A Google search reveals that I've found a Miraculous Medal. Since 1832, Catholics have been wearing them, believing in Mary's promise that all who do "will receive great graces."

It's a sign. I'm going to Italy.

I'M AT A YOGA RETREAT in a Tuscan village an hour's drive from Florence. I am here to exercise and eat and make my pilgrimage to Venus at the Uffizi Gallery.

The airline lost my luggage, but I'm chill. The Chianti Classico countryside is visual Xanax. The town of Barberino Val d'Elsa looks like it sounds: undulating green hills of lush groves and vineyards punctuated with the stiff quill of a cypress here, a beautifully aging farmhouse there. I arrive at the villa where I'm staying, La Chiara di Prumiano, and stroll among the pomegranates, grapes, and olives. I gorge on fruit.

That evening I meet the 30 other yoga participants, an eclectic, international group ranging in age from early 20s to mid-70s. Our first practice is an al fresco session of sun salutations under sun-battered oaks.

The aroma of oregano and roasting tomatoes lures us to dinner in the garden. Seated at a long table under a canopy of vines, we feast on focaccia dipped in olive oil (pressed on the premises), chicken cacciatore, and sorbet made from backyard figs.

As we share our vino (12 euros for *rosso* or *bianco*; just scribble your name on the bottle), our teacher, Greg Marzullo, a popular D.C.-based yogi, offers an introduction to our week.

"This is about disrupting the pattern," Greg explains. "You have left your life for a period of time. Put down the laptop and



phone and make space for mystery to have her way with you.” We return to our rooms exhausted from our first day. I feel tentative about having roommates. I’m bunking with Jackie Sparks, a blonde, Amazonian free spirit who’s been an art teacher and air traffic controller, and Wendy Evans, an opera-loving cardiac sonographer and grandmother of three. Both offer to share their essentials until my luggage arrives. Wendy hands me a new toothbrush and a postcard of David’s marbled anatomy.

“Keep it, I bought 12,” says grandma Wendy. “I’m sending them to my daughters. And my mother.”

WHEN JACKIE’S IPHONE MERENGUES at 7 a.m., I regret my miscalculation that this yoga retreat will be relaxing. I join the line of coffeepot pilgrims. Our salvation is espresso so unrelenting it swallows milk Bermuda Triangle-style no matter how much you pour.

“Let’s go, yoginis,” chirps Greg, leading us outside into a field. As the sun slices through pink and orange clouds, he teaches us the verses of “Jesce Sole,” a southern Italian folk song. We

sing in cascading rounds. Greg’s operatic voice and the heavenly light are so beautiful that I find myself sobbing.

The act sweeps my busy mind clean and allows a simple, if cryptic, question to surface. *Can you receive?*

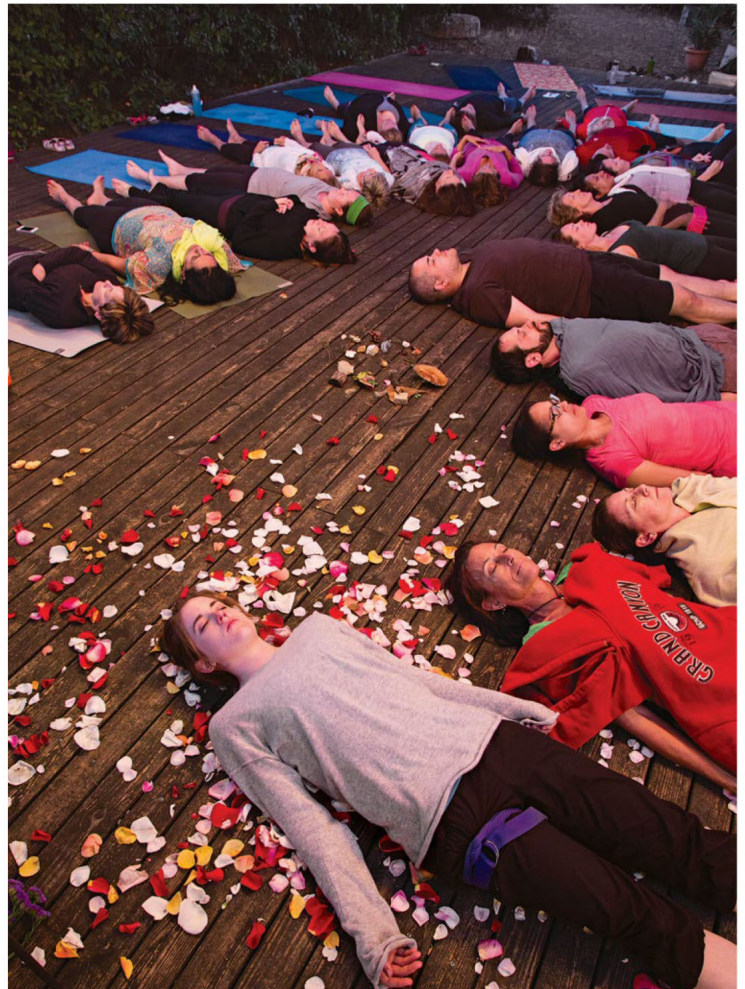
I feel something shift inside. I’m the tiniest bit unmoored. “That’s ecstasy,” Greg whispers. “You know those paintings of saints with tears streaming down their faces? *Ekstasis* means an out-of-body experience.”

I look at him bewildered. He doesn’t seem surprised. “We were singing a sun chant in a mode that slows brainwaves to a meditative state,” he says. “Ancient cultures have sun chants. Their purpose is to bring light to dark places.”

Mystery is making her appearance all right.

A GARDENER PUSHES a wheelbarrow filled with shiny fennel heads and an orange bouquet of zucchini blossoms. People sit alone with a book, journal, sketchbook, or camera in the backyard sun. Jet-lagged, everyone wanders in and out of their rooms to nap.

Resting poses (from far left): Participants gather at a yoga retreat at La Chiara di Prumiano, a center for holistic wellness. La Chiara’s garden supplies figs and other fresh ingredients for communal meals. The center is located near the village of San Donato in Poggio, where housekeeper Rettori Vanna sweeps up at local inn La Locanda di Pietracupa. Meditation brings yoga practice to a close at La Chiara.





Happy baby isn't just a yoga pose in the Tuscan village of San Donato in Poggio, where cars are not allowed within the medieval walls.

My sandal strap snaps while I'm walking. No luggage. Now no shoes. "Borrow mine," says Wendy.

I don't know why it's hard to accept help from strangers but it is. Once again the cryptic message "Can you receive?" floats through my thoughts. Reluctantly I do.

That evening Greg offers an alarmingly graphic visualization of our bodies burning away. "Your bones crack and turn to ash," he says. "The blood boils, sizzles, and steams away. The skull pops open, letting the boiling content ooze out like lava." Jackie gasps.

"Imagine them turning into something," Greg directs. I picture a soaring white bird. "That image is a gift," he says.

At bedtime we compare notes on our "gifts."

"A black-domed pyramid temple," says Wendy. "I think it means higher learning."

"I pictured a green ball that turned into a human heart," says Jackie. "Which is what I want, a new heart. But that was really over-the-top, didn't you think?"

On the fourth day, the villa's owner, Antonio Pescetti, strides toward me. He's tan and handsome with longish salt-and-pepper hair and Italian-preppy clothes. "Your luggage—no trace!" he informs me apologetically.

The next thing I know, we're in Pescetti's Volkswagen bounding through the countryside toward the town of Poggibonsi to buy some basics.

"We were among the first in Tuscany to practice organic farming," he explains along the way, "Chianti Classico, olive oil, jams from figs and plums—we tried everything."

Back then, La Chiara di Prumiano didn't seem like the most obvious hotel. "No heating, two bathrooms," he says.

Over the decades, however, he and his wife, Gaia, renovated the 17th-century farmhouse (once owned by a Florentine nobleman, Principe Corsini), retaining the architecture while adding sustainable updates like biomass heating systems and photovoltaic panels.

"My daughter was born here and my sister is buried here. We built a little chapel on the land. I feel like, how you say, roots?" says Pescetti, who considers his guests extended family. "We love to take care of people. People come here sad and we watch them change."

THAT NIGHT AFTER OUR CLASS we discover a large mirror in the middle of our yoga circle. Greg calls us up one at a time to take a long look. Reactions vary from serious to smiley. Subha Maruvada, the woman next to me, returns to her mat weeping. It's my turn. Finally I hear what he's whispered to each of the others: "Stare into the eyes of the goddess."

I try, but I'm distracted by my flaws: my lank, dirty hair, the circles under my eyes. I kick myself. Then I kick myself for kicking myself when I'm supposed to be staring into the eyes

of the goddess. *Can you receive?* Apparently not over the din of my self-criticism.

At dinner, I indulge in the hot-from-the-oven focaccia, despite my gluten restriction. I'm not the only one straying from dietary confines. The *peposo*, beef braised for hours in red wine, peppercorns, and garlic, is so tender I watch vegans have seconds.

Afterwards, I ask Subha what she saw in the mirror.

"Casey, my cat," she says. "He died after 17 years."

Another evening Greg concludes our 10 p.m. class with a surprising instruction: "Between now and tomorrow night there will be no talking," he says. "Absolute silence. Give yourself this chance to go inward."

At breakfast the only audible sound is the clink of spoon against bowl, the percussion of chopping in the kitchen, the crunch of gravel underfoot.

But that doesn't stop a group of determined outlet shoppers unwilling to let the day's mandate get between them and a Prada bargain.

"You may speak to the salesperson," Greg negotiates. "But not a word to each other." The latest trend, Zen Retail: Silent Outlet Shopping—I want to joke to Wendy and Jackie, but can't.

WE LEARN THAT our silence has been to prepare for the ancient, ecstatic dance, the tarantella. Greg apprenticed with Alessandra Belloni, a world-renowned percussionist and healer who taught him Italian shamanic techniques, including the tarantella and its mystical history. From as far back as the 16th century, this fast, spinning dance has been used to cure a hysteria brought on by the bite of the poisonous wolf spider, as well as psychological and psychic distress, before the era of pharmaceutical aid.

We learn the steps quickly (think pogo stick meets carousel) and the up-tempo music starts. Greg bangs his drum and we whirl like dervishes. I feel like an ant on a turntable. Above me the green trees and blue sky swirl together like spin art. I twirl so quickly I fall to my knees. Yet the turntable keeps spinning around me. Others pull me up, urge me to keep going.

By the time the experience is finally over, five of us have fallen, four vomited, and one participant sobbed so hard she was keening. I loved it!

We close and dinner is ready, but nobody breaks the circle. Physically and emotionally spent, we gape at each other, saying without saying that *something* happened.

Perhaps that something is that less than a week ago we were a group of strangers, and now we're bonded into a solid group of shared experiences. We've eaten, slept, sweated together, and now we can add surviving a musical exorcism.

I'll miss the nightly musings with my roommates. We've covered everything from the day's epiphanies to the specifics of each other's snoring. We've discussed suicide, addiction, heartbreak, divorce, and our children's diagnoses. On our last



Lots to love in Tuscany: bruschetta at La Chiara di Prumiano

Tuscany's Treasures

Uffizi Gallery

FLORENCE

Home to the world's finest collection of Renaissance paintings, the Uffizi is probably the one sight you should see in Florence if you see no other. To avoid the long entrance lines year-round, reserve a pre-timed ticket in advance at frenzemusei.it.

Il Campo

SIENA

Intimate and manageable, this medieval walled city south of Florence is crammed with culture. Il Campo is the sloping, scallop-shaped square at its heart, where the annual Palio horse races take place. Branching from there, narrow cobblestoned lanes are lined with shops selling Florentine stationery, rainbow mounds of gelato, and other Tuscan goods.

Campo dei Miracoli

PISA

In Pisa's central piazza (square), the Leaning Tower survived World War II bombs

that ravaged the rest of this Tuscan city of science and learning (Galileo was born here). Visits to the Leaning Tower, which involve climbing 294 steps, must be reserved online 12-20 days in advance at opapisa.it.

Wine Tasting

CHIANTI

Many small wineries in the Chianti region between Florence and Siena offer short, informal tastings and tours. Find a winery with a sign saying Vendita Diretta ("direct sales") or Degustazioni ("tastings").

Adapted from the National Geographic Traveler guidebook Florence & Tuscany.

Visit Tuscany with Nat Geo

The 10-day itinerary for National Geographic Expeditions' "Inside Italy" trip includes visits to the Tuscan cities of Pisa, Lucca, and Florence. For details go to natgeoexpeditions.com.

day, as we reluctantly pack up our room, Jackie declares, "You are both very generous people."

There is one last thing I need to do to round out my soul-searching week: find Venus. Florence is the birthplace of the Renaissance, the cultural shift that introduced diplomacy to politics, observation to science, and perspective to art. Perspective is exactly what I've come to seek.

One of the oldest museums in the world, the Uffizi displays works by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Caravaggio. But I go straight to Botticelli's "Birth of Venus."

Reaching this moment has taken me five years, 4,366 miles, four airplanes, and the synchronization of a yoga retreat. I sit on a bench directly in front of the enormous painting, and my field of vision is filled with...buttocks. Tourist buttocks of all shapes and sizes.

I catch glimpses of the seafaring, voluptuous goddess with alabaster skin and Rapunzel hair. Art critics have deemed Venus's elongated proportions "anatomically improbable" and her pose "impossible," as she would certainly tip over her shell and face-plant into the sea. It's also true that her dark outline and lack of shadows renders her flat, like a sticker you can peel. Everything in the painting is moving, fluttering. Yet Venus herself looks as calm as the clamshell she rode in on.

Note to self: *Be calm.*

Next, I notice her gaze. She is looking toward us, but her eyes indicate that her thoughts are far, far away.

Go inward, I think.

How to decipher her expression? A slight smile plays upon her lips, but her eyes look wistful. Is she happy? Sad? Homesick? Tender is the best I can surmise.

Be tender.

Shocking display of white skin, belly gently rounded.

Be authentic, vulnerable, and brave.

Eventually I rise to leave. No dramatic "aha" moment, but one can't argue with the subtle wisdom. I make my way through the throngs for a close-up good-bye. As soon as I draw near the canvas, my head fills with one word. It's as if the volume of my female intuition is turned to its highest setting. "*Love!*"

I want to smack the painting. Venus drags me all the way to Florence to tell me the secret to life is love? Doesn't everyone know that? Can she be a bit more specific? No. Venus sticks to her monosyllabic script. "Love, love, love, love, love."

As I leave the Uffizi, it hits me. Venus didn't let me down at all. She simply finished my soul's incomplete question: Can you receive...*love?*

MELINA BELLOWES ([@melinabellows](https://twitter.com/melinabellows)) is National Geographic Partners' Editorial Director for Kids and Family. Contributing photographer CATHERINE KARNOW ([@catherinekarnow](https://twitter.com/catherinekarnow)) leads photo workshops in Italy.

Better Living on a Scale From...

RELAX — — — — — TO — — — — — RAVE! — — — — —

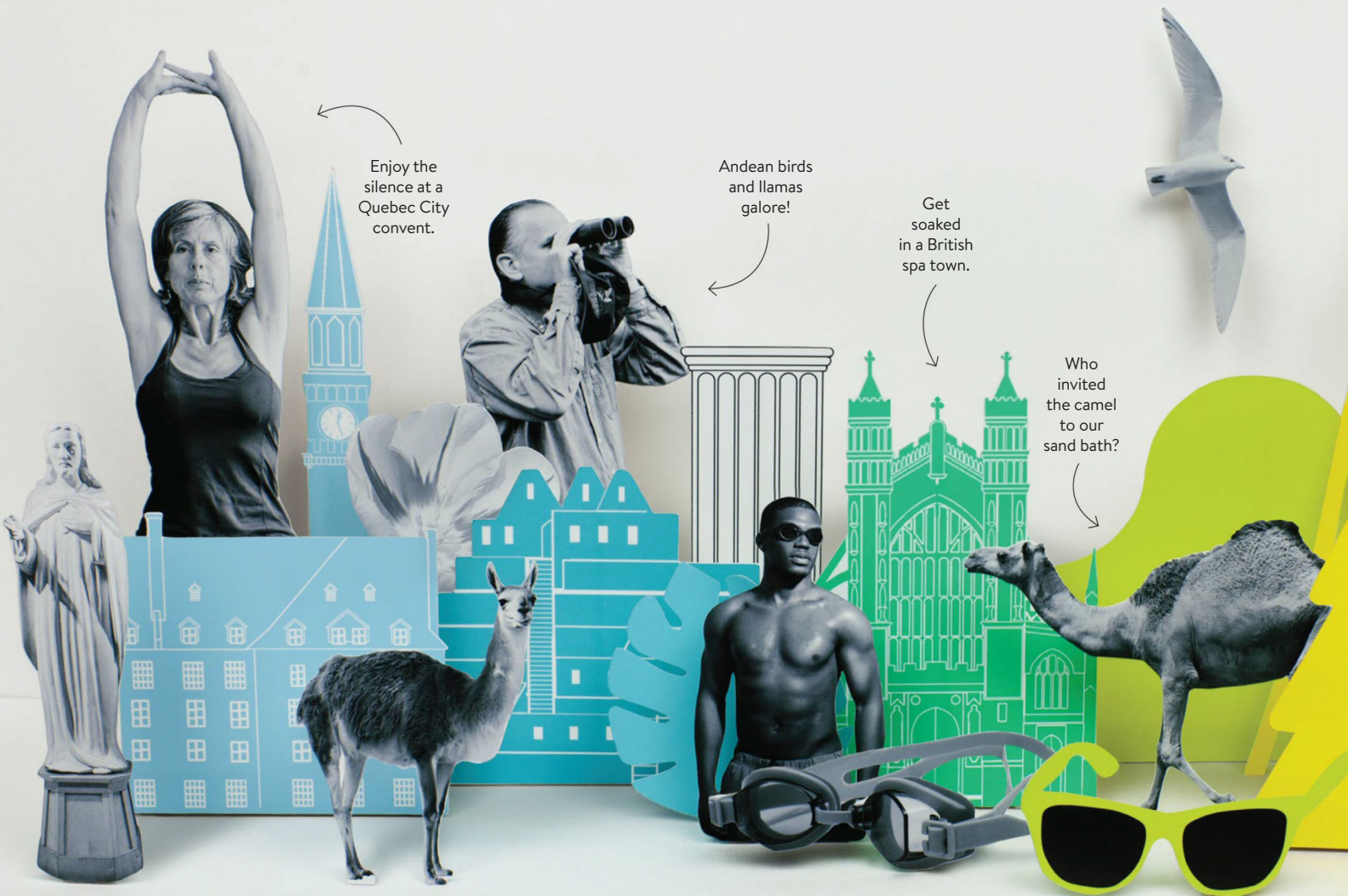
BLISS INDEX

BY JENNIFER BARGER
ILLUSTRATION BY
JAMES TAYLOR



11

Experiences
that Provide
a Mental
and Physical
Reboot



Enjoy the silence at a Quebec City convent.

Andean birds and llamas galore!

Get soaked in a British spa town.

Who invited the camel to our sand bath?

1

COOL CLOISTER

QUEBEC CITY, CANADA

Recently opened in the heart of Old Quebec, Le Monastère des Augustines offers the serenity of a convent but with options for yoga and scrapbooking thrown in. The 65-room wellness retreat is partly housed in the restored cloister of the Augustinian Sisters, health care pioneers who founded here, in the 17th century, the first hospital in North America outside of Mexico. monastere.ca/en

2

Honor Your Mother

AGUAS CALIENTES, PERU

Before journeying up to the Inca ruins on Machu Picchu, give your mother a call. Mother Earth, that is. At traditional “payment to the Earth” rituals at Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel (one of the National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World), a shaman helps guests honor Pachamama (Mother Earth) by burning a gift-wrapped package that includes coca leaves, a llama fetus, sweets, and confetti. The two-hour ceremony pays tribute to the *apus* (mountain gods). “I’m not a spiritual person, but when the shaman bundled things together and put them in the fire,” says Noa Artzi-Weill, who participated in the ritual this year, “I was moved.” natgeolodges.com

3

TAKE THE WATERS

BATH, ENGLAND

This British town’s mineral-rich geothermal waters are purported to increase endorphins and reduce joint pain. The Celts and Romans wouldn’t have used those exact words to explain their attraction to this area centuries ago, but they might still feel at home at the new Gainsborough Bath Spa, with its Doric columns and mosaic tile. www.thegainsboroughbathspa.co.uk

4

Decompress in the Desert

MERZOUGA, MOROCCO

Think of it as a sand bath. During the sweltering months of July and August, blue-turbaned Berbers dig bathtub-size holes in the ochre Sahara sand, wait for the grains to heat up in the sun, and then bury customers up to their necks. Participants stay in the ground about 10 minutes, and afterward are wrapped in blankets for an hour and rehydrate with tea. The sweaty sauna-like treatment soothes muscles. Most hotels in the area, including the castle-like Ksar Merzouga, can organize a *bain de sable*. ksar-merzouga.com/en



5

WALK ON TREETOPS

UPSTATE NEW YORK

Get a bird's soaring perspective on the Adirondacks via the new Wild Walk, an elevated, bridgelike boardwalk, ranging from two to four stories high, that winds through the forest canopy. Along the way, visitors get a peek at surrounding mountains, lounge in a human-size spider web, and play in a twig tree house. wildcenter.org

6

Yoga Mash-ups

MONTANA AND SWITZERLAND

Yoga classes are flowing off the mat. In winter, Montana's Ranch at Rock Creek (one of the National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World) offers "snowga." Participants cross-country ski or snowshoe up to higher mountain elevations, then—with boots and snowshoes on and skis off—practice warrior and mountain poses in the snowpack, which is sticky enough that mats aren't necessary. At the historic Gstaad Palace in the Swiss Alps, "woga" classes take place in a heated pool where instructors hold yogis up during seated positions so they're never fully submerged. natgeolodges.com, palace.ch

7

MOUNTAIN HIGH

LABRADOR, CANADA

Fly-fishing expeditions and backcountry camping are just some of the natural stimulants in Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve. Now the largest park in Eastern Canada, the 4,131-square-mile wilderness is co-managed by native Innu tribes, who also run Park Lake Lodge, which can only be reached via seaplane. Guests there bunk in rustic rooms and when they aren't trying to land the big one, they can take part in Innu-led craft lessons, such as learning how to make hide boots. parklakelodge.com

8

Two-Wheel Safaris

SOUTH AFRICA AND SWAZILAND

Safari-goers use cycling legs, not jeeps, on African Bikers' small-group tours, which pedal past zebras, hippos, and impalas amid the dramatic granite peaks and soothing grasslands of the Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary, in Swaziland. Daily rides range from 11 to 37 miles and cruise through Zulu villages and Kruger National Park in South Africa, and along the Indian Ocean shoreline. Get out of the saddle for visits to crafts collectives and Durban's Indian spice market. africanbikers.com



9

HEAVENLY HIKE

VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

The 64-mile Great Ocean Walk meanders through deserted beaches and the Otways rain forests, before ending in view of the offshore limestone stacks known as the Twelve Apostles. Hikers might spot kangaroos, wallabies, or whales. Do the whole trail in about a week (there are campsites along the way), or just portions via a guided trip. visitgreatoceanroad.org.au/greatoceanwalk

10

Waves of Wellness

SUMBA ISLAND, INDONESIA

Surfers travel the world in search of those adrenaline-inducing perfect waves. At Sumba Island's Nihiwatu resort, fronting the Indian Ocean, "there's a juxtaposition of trade winds, swell direction, and distance from storms," says part-time surfing instructor Terry Simms. "It creates some of the smoothest and most undisturbed swells in the world." Experienced boarders tackle Occy's Left, a barreling, long left break; beginners can take lessons using rental equipment. Guests can stay in thatch-roofed villas that mimic traditional Sumbanese houses. nihiwatu.com

11

DANCE AT DAWN

MULTIPLE CITIES

Daybreaker, a series of early a.m. raves launched in New York, brings booze-free yoga and DJ-fueled dance parties to nightclubs. The clean fun can be found in London, Paris, Washington, and soon, Shanghai and Hong Kong. They're powered by green juice and fair-trade coffee. "I love that you see all shapes, ages, and sizes dancing and smiling," says D.C. fan Deepa Venkataraman. dybrkr.com

D.C.-based writer and fashion stylist JENNIFER BARGER can be found on Twitter and Instagram at @dcjnell.

PAGE 65: LJUPCO/GETTY IMAGES (BICYCLE); NERTHUZ/GETTY IMAGES (TELESCOPE); FIZKES/GETTY IMAGES (YOGA); MIKHAIL ABRAMOV/SHUTTERSTOCK (LOWER PEONY); OLEGGANKO/SHUTTERSTOCK (UPPER PEONY); JOAKIM LEROY/GETTY IMAGES (STONES); SOLEG/GETTY IMAGES (SEAGULL); REBIUS/GETTY IMAGES (AIRPLANE). PAGE 66: LE MONASTÈRE DES AUGUSTINES (STATUE AND YOGA); JACK/GETTY IMAGES (GUANACO); JAMES TAYLOR (TULIP); COURTESY INKATERRA (BIRD-WATCHER); YSBRAND COSJUN/GETTY IMAGES (SWIMMER); TEREX/GETTY IMAGES (GOGGLES); KANOKSAK DETBOON/GETTY IMAGES (CAMEL); SOLEG/GETTY IMAGES (BIRD). PAGE 67: GURUXOOX/GETTY IMAGES (SNOWGA); LECHIENGRAND/GETTY IMAGES (FLOATPLANE); EDESEL QUERINI/GETTY IMAGES (FLY FISHERMAN); BURAZIN/GETTY IMAGES (GIRAFFE); PRAPASSONG/GETTY IMAGES (ZEBRA); 4X6/GETTY IMAGES (BICYCLIST). PAGE 68: NO. LIMIT. PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES (HIKER); BRIAN MCENTIRE/ISTOCKPHOTO (BOOTS); 4X6/GETTY IMAGES (SURFER); CHORALE MILES/DAYBREAKER (DANCING WOMAN); OPOLJA/GETTY IMAGES (DISCO BALL); ANDREW RAUNER/DAYBREAKER (YOGIS STRETCHING)

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In the “land of the hummingbird,” valleys trill with birdsong and coastal formations such as Cathedral Rock on Paria Beach frame the sea.

A photograph of a beach with waves crashing against a rocky shore under a cloudy sky. The foreground shows a sandy beach with gentle ripples. The ocean has white foam from the waves. In the distance, there are several rocky islets or sea stacks. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds.

*Drumming and dancing,
singing birds and sound waves—
this Caribbean island marches
to the beat of its own steel pan.*

BY ERIC FELTEN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY AARON HUEY

THE SONG OF TRINIDAD

Pan players with the Desperadoes Steel Orchestra practice for their performance at the 2016 National Panorama competition. Formed in the 1940s, Desperadoes is one of Trinidad's oldest—and winningest—pan groups.





THUNDERING. CLANGORING.

The air around me throbs and shatters with the sound of steel pans. I'm in Queen's Park Savannah, a big patch of green in the heart of Port of Spain, capital of the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, and I can barely move. To my right, more than a hundred musicians hunch over their pans, their hands moving in a choreographed flurry as they strike at their steel drums. To my left, 120 more play just as furiously. In front of me, yet another steel-pan orchestra makes its own riot of sound as it competes with its rivals.

We all are backstage at the finals of Trinidad's top steel-band competition, Panorama, held the Saturday night before Carnival. Ten large bands have lined up along the paved track that leads to the Grand Stand stage. Each is jamming in a final rehearsal before the contest begins, hurtling through its competition piece. My ears try to absorb the astonishing clash of grooves and melodies, astonishing in part because the sound is earsplittingly loud without electronic amplification. It's as if the modernist Charles Ives had composed in the Caribbean.

Many of us think of steel drums as the default sound of the Caribbean islands, a sort of aural equivalent of an umbrella drink. But this percussive instrument belongs to Trinidad: The improbable feat of turning discarded oil drums into sweetly melodic instruments was conceived in the rougher and rowdier neighborhoods of Port of Spain.

Called pan locally, the steel drum is a deceptively difficult instrument to master. Unlike the piano or, my instrument, the trombone, where notes are arranged in a line, on a pan a C isn't next to a C sharp, it's on the opposite side of the bowl. This both flummoxes and captivates the jazz trombonist in me. Always

on the hunt for new sounds and musical ideas for my own jazz orchestra, I couldn't wait to get to this, the world's most intense—and joyful—showcase of pan playing.

I'm in the middle of a crush of fans who've come to help their favorite bands by "pushing pan." Sets of steel drums sit on wheeled racks; fans and pannists together roll each band's drum battery along the pavement and, eventually, up the ramp to the stage. I wedge my way through the crowd looking for bands familiar to me. I spot Phase II Pan Groove, one of the top "large" steel bands in recent years, headed by "Mozart of the pan" Len "Boogsie" Sharpe. The players, in exuberant red, yellow, and green vests and caps, show the easy confidence of front-runners.

Nearby I find the Supernovas, a young band fresh from the northern hill town of Surrey. Until last year, the Supernovas had competed only in small-band competitions. Now they've bulked the band up to 120 players and, in their first go at the Panorama semifinals, almost bested Phase II. It doesn't hurt that they're led by Amrit Samaroo, son of one of the great original pan men.

I grab a Trini-brewed Carib beer from one of the stalls that line the track and press through the fans until I can no longer move.

Above, a banner proclaims “Desperadoes.” The fans right here aren’t just more plentiful, they’re more intense. As is the music. Somehow, in the tightly packed quarters, people are dancing to the fierce rhythms of the Desperadoes Steel Orchestra.

This band, affectionately known as Despers, connects right back to pan’s mean-street origins in the years around World War II, when no respectable Trinidadian parents allowed their kids to have anything to do with the instrument. As one early pan innovator, Carlton “Zigilee” Constantine, said of the bands in the 1940s and ’50s, “You must have a little villain in you” to be a pan man. Bands would fight, sometimes violently, over girls, turf, songs. Typical was this 1950 headline in the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper: “Steelbands Clash; Corrosive Fluid, Cutlasses Used.”

The Desperadoes formed in Laventille, a gritty neighborhood in the hardscrabble hills that overlook Port of Spain. A lingering “badjohn” reputation remains a measure of the group’s authenticity, which clearly is valued by the loyal following I see here on the track. Some say that street brawling gave rise to the Panorama competition, devised to channel any hooliganism into something more productive around the time Trinidad and Tobago achieved independence from Britain in 1962.

Not that anyone in Trinidad needs a reason to start a competition; Trinidadians will turn almost anything into a contest. Among the dozens that lead up to Carnival will be one for “Calypso King” (best calypso singer) and for “Soca King” (best singer of the island’s modern, calypso-derived pop). Trinis, as Trinidadians call themselves, even consider the singing of birds a sport—not surprising on an island that counts more than 450 bird species and honors an eight-time Calypso King named Mighty Sparrow. In a park one afternoon, I spot men hooking birdcages to stands. The bullfinches inside begin tweeting and whistling in what are known as “bullin’ sessions,” which can last the day and include no small amount of betting on which birds will sing the most.

Birdsong is both lure and reward at the 270-acre Asa Wright Nature Center, a top Caribbean birding spot that sits high in the crease of a mountain east of Port of Spain. I barely have my bag out of the car trunk when I’m startled by some unseen fowl’s hoarse call, followed by what sounds like the klaxon honk of an old Parisian taxi. Crickets, frogs, and breeze-blown trees provide a background hum.

Perched on the hillside before me is an elegant dowager of a plantation house, white with narrow green shutters. Birdwatchers armed with binoculars and telescopic lenses flock to the veranda, which overlooks a valley lush with ferns and palms and flowering vines. A disproportionate number of the birders seem to be retired computer-science professors, but I also chat with the leader of a Canadian Bee Gees tribute band.

Guides on the veranda and along the forest trails help with bird spotting, pointing out everything from green-winged parrots (difficult to see in the foliage) to deftly darting hummingbirds. Many birds initially are identified by their song, which rallies the musician in me. I pick out the modest little whooping of the green-winged motmot (it seems embarrassed to be making any sound at all) and the squeaky chittering of thrushes. The bearded bellbird (“bearded” thanks to its throat wattles) makes a noise like a race-starter’s buzzer, followed by what sounds like the banging of a lead pipe on an old brake drum.

“That buzzer sound is a warning to other male bellbirds or intruders to back off,” says guide Caleb Walker, “while the clanking is a come-hither call.” The green-backed trogon alternates a mewling whistle with the toot-tooting of a third-grader taking up the recorder. But to my ears, the best of all will be the extravagant call of the yellow-tailed crested oropendola, a song that starts with the roll of a toy snare drum and surges into a comical calliope arpeggio.

Midway into this new game of mine I discover birds I’d much rather see than hear. Topping the list is the scarlet ibis, Trinidad’s national bird, which visits Asa Wright but congregates in the Caroni Swamp, an estuarine reserve south of Port of Spain that will be my next stop. First impressions underwhelm: Hard by a highway exit I find a dirt parking lot and a small dock where a jumble of boats with bench seats moor in a canal. One boat is inviting passengers, so I board and we head out. Within minutes the canal gives way to mangrove-cloistered estuaries that open onto a string of serene tidal lakes. As the late-afternoon sky eases from blue to dusky mauve, clusters of scarlet ibises (more like electric-crimson ibises, so intense is their red-pink hue) swoop in low and fast over the water and, in a flurry of flapping, pull up to roost in the mangroves. There are so many of them, thousands, that their red feathers against the green foliage make the trees look like giant pyracantha bushes.

For a place only eight miles from the capital, Caroni Swamp feels improbably remote. The same could be said about Trinidad. Whether by choice or an admirable indifference to touristy imperatives, Trinis have not gone out of their way to make their natural attractions easy to get to. I’m eager to visit Paria Bay, a secluded cove known for a natural stone arch. I could reach it by driving the winding roads into the hilly Northern Range, to road’s end at the village of Brasso Seco, then embark on an hours-long hike. Or I could hire, as I now do, a fishing boat at the coastal village of Las Cuevas, an hour’s drive northeast of Port of Spain. I find a sharp-nosed skiff skippered by Barry; on board is a fisherman named Neil. The sky is cloudy as the boat slaps across rough waters past the hamlet of Blanchisseuse. Neil stands at the prow scanning for rocks and reefs as we wend our way around jutting cays topped by lonely trees.

Tarps strung just behind Paria Beach flag where a handful of



Green goddess:
Emerald shades
sparkle in a
white-tailed,
golden-throated
hummingbird's
plumage and in
a costume
at Carnival.



Out of the blue:
Dappled with
Carnival colors,
a merry-maker
echoes the bold
hues of a white-
necked Jacobin
hummingbird.







Ahead of Carnival, kids have their own day to celebrate in Port of Spain.

families live; otherwise the cove feels deserted. At the far end of the sand I make out a high stone arch buffeted by waves. It's such a striking spot that just about any country eager for tourist dollars would have paved a road to the water's edge. But Trinidad has built its economy around its primary resources, oil and gas, not tourism. As one Trinidadian expat I know said, drawing herself up with pride, "We're a nation, not a tourist destination."

Which may be why I now have a remarkable place like Paria to myself. I stroll the sand to the arch, known as Cathedral Rock, which, I now see, frames a rock pillar that looks like a pulpit. On the way I keep an eye on the water for leatherback turtles, 10,000 of which cross the Atlantic Ocean every year or two to nest along Trinidad's beaches in one of the world's largest leatherback gatherings. They usually begin arriving in March, however, and it's only February. None cruise by.

Trinidad culture is built around habits of sociability, especially "liming," a term Trinidadians invented for hanging out. One can "make a lime" anywhere—at a bar, at a park, by the side of the road—anytime. But the essential lime is the weekend river lime.

On a Sunday afternoon I head with guide Gerald Nicholas into the Northern Range, the chain of low mountains that rears up east of the capital. (Opting for a guide is a good idea for first-time visitors to Trinidad; many smaller routes aren't marked.) Soon we're on a road following a stream.

Through trees, I see families and friends picnicking riverside. Nicholas hollers to a clutch of men in swim trunks, cooking over campfires on a sandbar. They wave us down.

Bindra Singh and his friends greet us with beers icy from the cooler. We shoot the breeze over a boombox blaring chutney soca, the Trini music that mixes pop with Indian rhythms and Hindi lyrics (thousands of Indians came to Trinidad as indentured laborers in the 1900s). "A lime is all about friends and food," says Singh. They feed their fires driftwood and bits of broken bamboo to heat pots arranged on three river rocks. I ask what's cooking. "Curry duck and provision soup," the latter a mix of bananas, peas, peppers, carrots, dasheen (taro), dumplings, and whatever else might be on hand. I get a first bite of the duck, which comes out of the pot as sizzling hot as it is spicy.

A gaggle of kids splash around downriver as parents lounge along the banks. Other limers plop foldable tables right in the stream, for one cool picnic. A young man wades past with a homemade speargun—a hand-carved gun stock rigged with rubber bands to catapult a sharpened shank of heavy wire. He's hunting fish for a lime of his own.

Another popular lime is hanging out at a pan yard. A few nights before the Panorama finals are to take place I'm in the pan yard—essentially a paved lot—where the Supernovas Steel Orchestra rehearses in its hometown of Surrey. It's past 9 p.m. and Supernova musicians are still arriving, many straight from their jobs more than an hour away in Port of Spain. As

the players set up, the various sections begin working on their parts. In front sit the high-pitched “tenor” pans that usually carry the melody and the “double tenors” that harmonize with them. To the left are the “guitars,” “cellos,” and larger mid-range pans that “strum” chords under the tenors. On the right sit the oil drums—as many as a dozen per player—that bang out the bass notes like industrial timpani. On a platform in the back is the “engine room,” with drum kit, congas, bongos, and other rhythm instruments.

All are playing their own trickiest bits over and over, a discordant jumble of sound that builds and builds as more players arrive and join in. That is, until three sharp bangs from a cowbell bring instant silence. It’s drill master Sonalal “Killer” Samaroo, who, after a pause, raps out a rhythm that starts the song.

What happens next astounds me.

I’ve heard plenty of steel pan, but always by small groups—a couple of pannists at a party, a pan soloist in a jazz band. But I’d never heard a full steel orchestra perform live, so am utterly unprepared for the onslaught of sound when more than a hundred pannists strike in sync.

And the Supernovas are very much in sync. Tightly drilled, eager, attentive, they stop and work the hardest sections over and over. The cowbell kicks them off fast. Then they do the part again, this time at a snail’s pace, then once more at just the right tempo.

They’re playing a seven-minute arrangement by Amrit Samaroo, whose father—and Sonalal’s brother—Jit, started a little family steel band as a schoolkid in the countryside and became one of the great pan pioneers. “Everything I learned was from him,” Amrit says.

Plenty of pannists read music fluently, but the tradition remains to learn every note directly from the pan of the arranger. Even now, just days before Panorama, Amrit goes from section to section tweaking the arrangement and showing players new variations, little surprises for the judges come the finals.

This all is wonderfully new to me but old hat to the residents of Surrey. Instead of complaining about the racket—which, after all, has been going on for some two months now, every night until two or three in the morning—the neighbors are out on their porches, liming.

The pan yard where Phase II Pan Groove practices, in an upscale part of Port of Spain, is another experience altogether, brightly lit and billboarded with ads for Yellow Tail Chardonnay. Bleachers teem with the band’s many fans. The players are rehearsing “Madd Music,” a dance tune with a singable melody bouncing over repeating riffs. It’s a happy, easygoing vibe: Where the Supernovas were taut with youthful ambition, Phase II grooves with the relaxed ease one expects of winners.



Trinidad’s High Notes

Panorama Finals

PORT OF SPAIN

Arguably the Caribbean’s most exuberant musical event, this steel-pan championship, held in the capital, showcases Trinidad’s top steel bands. The run-up includes regional pan competitions in Arima, a town in the foothills of the Northern Range, and San Fernando, a west coast city once home to the world’s largest sugar refinery. For ticket information: pantrinidad.co.tt

Queen’s Park Savannah

PORT OF SPAIN

The capital’s largest park is a 260-acre swath of green dotted with sports fields. Site of many events, including the National Panorama Finals, it’s ringed by the Royal Botanic Gardens and a row of historic Victorian residences known as the “Magnificent Seven.”

Brasso Seco

NORTHERN RANGE

Tucked into Trinidad’s northern mountains, this funky village has become a gateway for hikers and birders. Excursions include an eight-mile hike to Paria Bay, shorter waterfall treks, and joining weekend “river limes.”

Asa Wright Nature Centre

ARIMA VALLEY

The oldest nature center in the West Indies, Asa Wright is a 1,400-acre nature preserve on the lands of a onetime cacao and coffee plantation. Feeders draw an array of hummingbirds; trails offer sightings of toucans, oropendolas, and more. Guests may overnight in simple, cozy lodge rooms. asawright.org

Pointe-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust

POINTE-À-PIERRE

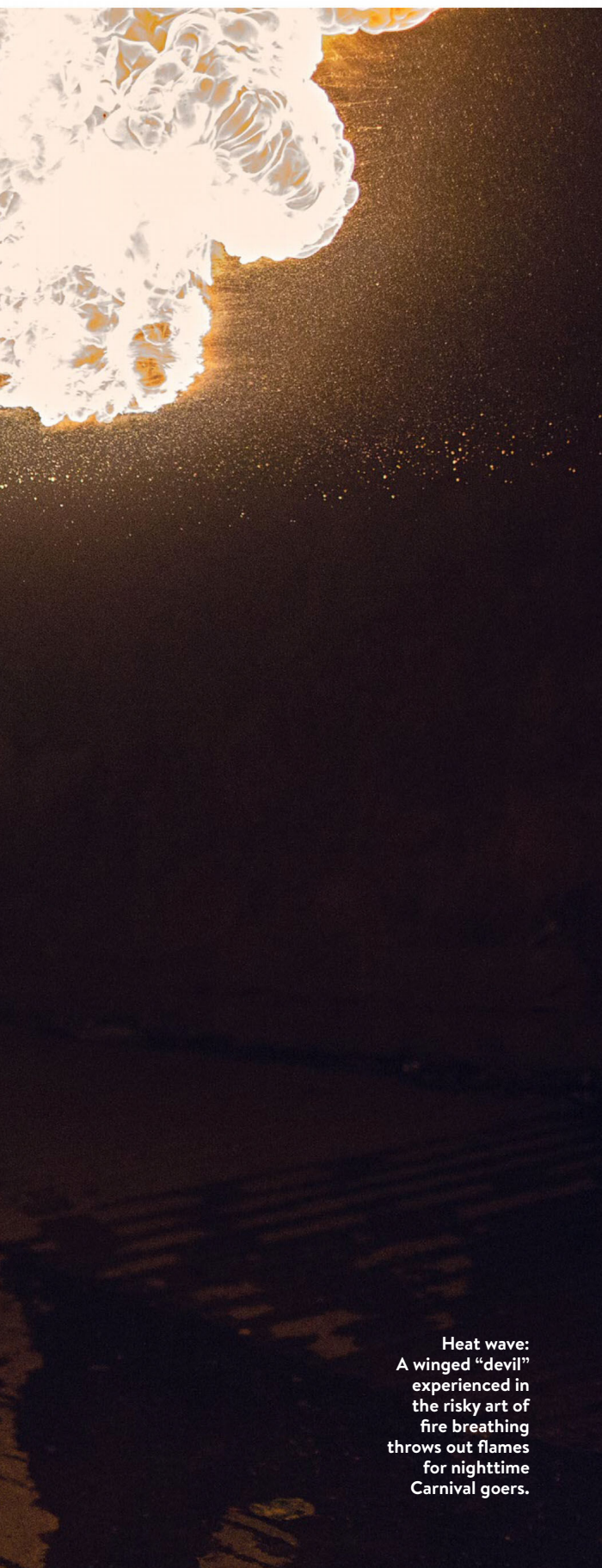
This gem of a nature preserve (celebrating its 50th year) nests within the Petrotrin oil refinery complex. Its 75 acres encompass wetlands and trails, where you see some of the 80-plus bird species recorded here, including scarlet ibises and macaws. papwildfowltrust.org

Caroni Swamp

SOUTH OF PORT OF SPAIN

A 12,000-acre “wetland of international importance,” mangrove-filled Caroni is a top roosting site for Trinidad’s national bird, the scarlet ibis. Best times to visit are in the morning and at sunset. Out-fitters include Nanan Bird Tours: nananecotours.com





Heat wave:
A winged “devil”
experienced in
the risky art of
fire breathing
throws out flames
for nighttime
Carnival goers.

Relaxed would not be the word to describe the Desperadoes as I watch them rehearse the following night in a borrowed, dimly lit pan yard in a scruffier part of Port of Spain. When their cowbell counts off, it's an entirely different sound—heavier, darker—that I hear. Despers play pan with a wide-shouldered, muscular swagger, and if the musicians aren't exactly scowling, I don't see many gratuitous smiles, either. This is a serious orchestra rehearsal.

During a break I recognize Clement Franklin. We had met earlier in the day at the Gill Pan Shop, where I'd watched craftsmen pound out 55-gallon steel barrels into pans. Clement is a tuner; he works his magic at the end of the pan-making process. Using a small hammer, he shapes the curves of every note on the pan until the intonation rings pitch-perfect. In his hands right now are the rubber-tipped mallets of a pan man. He also, yes, has a smile. “Playing pan with the Desperadoes is what I live for.”

Desperadoes will be the penultimate band to perform at Panorama, so it's nearly 2 a.m. when they finally take the stage. The Grand Stand crowd hasn't waned a bit. As the players position their many steel pans, commentators doing a national TV broadcast note how long it has been—a 16-year drought—since Desperadoes came out on top.

Finally, a drummer raps out a rhythm...and they're off, with all the ferocity I'd heard in the pan yard a few nights before, performing a piece titled “Different Me.” The pannists—women and men, youths and graybeards—dance rhythmically as they drum, bobbing, lunging, hopping, and twirling, leaning over their pans, wringing music out of steel.

By 3 a.m. the last band has played and the announcer calls out the scores. Third place is a tie, 283 points each for the Renegades and—disappointing their fans—Phase II Pan Groove. Second place, with 284 points, goes to the young hopefuls from Surrey. The Despers fans begin to roar. Desperadoes have finished first—by one point. The band, finally, is beaming.

In an age of world music, where producers scour distant places to capture every sort of indigenous song, there still is music that remains elusive—elusive because recording it can't come close to reproducing the actual experience of its sounds. This may be nowhere more true than at the Panorama Finals. What I now know: You can't grasp steel-pan music until you've heard a large pan orchestra play live in a pan yard; and you can't know Trinidad without doing the same.

Writer and musician ERIC FELTEN (🐦 @ericfeltten) *lives in Washington, D.C., where he leads the Eric Felten Jazz Orchestra. Photographer* AARON HUEY (📷 @argonautphoto) *recently published the photo book* *Where the Heaven Flowers Grow: The Life and Art of Leonard Knight.*

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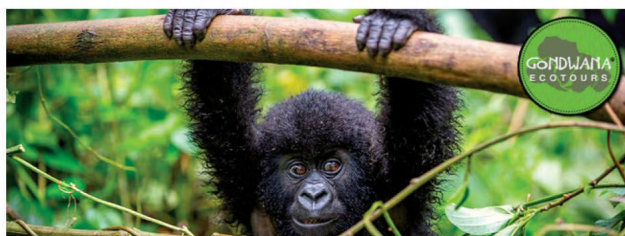
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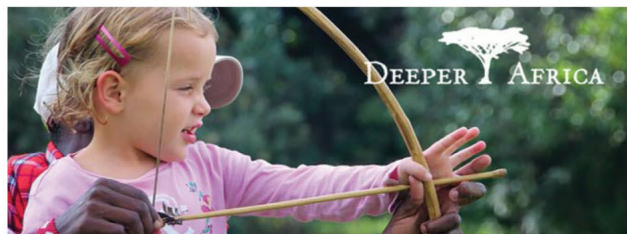
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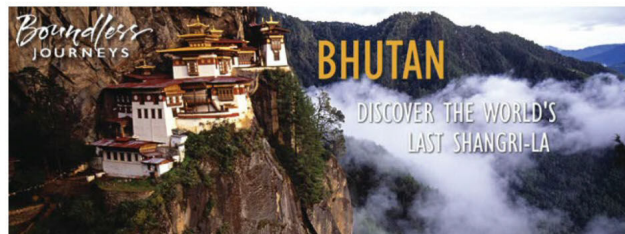
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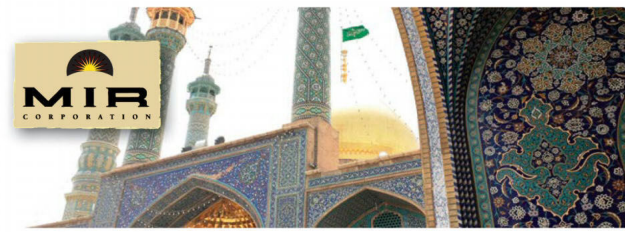
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